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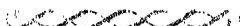


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G. PLEKHANOV

ВЪВЕДЕНИЕ И ПЕРВОЕ ИЗДАНИЕ ПОСВЯЩАЮТ СЕБЯ НА ПАМЯТЬ
ПРОСЛАВЛЕННОГО РУССКОГО ПИСАТЕЛЯ И ПУБЛИЦИСТА



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UNADDRESSED LETTERS
~
ART AND SOCIAL LIFE

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BY A. FINEBERG

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UNADDRESSED LETTERS





FIRST LETTER



Dear Sir,

The subject we shall be discussing is art. But in any exact inquiry, whatever its theme, it is essential to adhere to a strictly defined terminology. We must therefore say first of all what precise meaning we attach to the word *art*. On the other hand it is unquestionable that any at all satisfactory definition of a subject can only be obtained as a result of investigation. It follows, then, that we have to define something which we are not yet in a position to define. How can this contradiction be resolved? I think it can be resolved in this way: I shall take for the time being some provisional definition, and shall then amplify and correct it as the question becomes clearer in the course of the investigation.

What definition shall I take to begin with?

Lev Tolstoi, in his *What Is Art?* cites many definitions of art which seem to him mutually contradictory, and he finds them all unsatisfactory. Actually, the definitions he cites are by no means as different from one another, and by no means as erroneous as he thinks. But let us assume that all of them really are bad, and let us see if we cannot accept his own definition of art.

"Art," he says, "is a means of human intercourse. . . . The thing that distinguishes this means of intercourse from intercourse through words is that with the help of words one man communicates to another his *thoughts* (my italics); with the help of art, people communicate their *emotions*" (my italics again).

For the present I shall only make one observation.

In Count Tolstoi's opinion, art expresses men's *emotions*, and words their *thoughts*. This is not true. Words serve men not *only* for the expression of their thoughts, but *also* of their emotions. Proof: *poetry*, whose medium is *words*.

Count Tolstoi himself says:

"To re-evoke in oneself an emotion once experienced and, having re-evoked it, to convey it through movement, line, colour, images expressed in words, in such a way that others may experience the same emotion—therein lies the function of art."* From this it is already apparent that words, as a means of human intercourse, cannot be regarded as something special and distinct from art.

Nor is it true that art expresses *only* men's emotions. No, it expresses both their emotions and their *thoughts*—expresses them, however, not *abstractly*, but in *live images*. And this is its chief distinguishing feature. In Count Tolstoi's opinion, "art begins when a man, with a view to conveying to others an emotion he has experienced, re-evokes it in himself and expresses it in certain outward signs."** I, however, think that art begins when a man re-evokes in himself emotions and *thoughts* which he has experienced under the influence of surrounding reality and *expresses them in definite images*. It goes without saying that in the vast majority of cases he does so with the object of conveying what he has re-

* *Works of Count Tolstoi, Latest Writings*, Moscow, 1898, p. 78.

** *Ibid.*, p. 77.

thought and re-felt *to other men*. Art is a *social phenomenon*.

These, for the present, are all the corrections I should like to make in the definition of art given by Count Tolstoi.

But I would ask you, sir, to note also the following thought expressed by the author of *War and Peace*:

"Always, in every period and in every human society, there is a religious consciousness, common to all the members of that society, of what is good and bad, and it is this religious consciousness that determines the value of the emotions conveyed by art."*

Our inquiry should show how far this thought is correct. At any rate it deserves the greatest attention, because it brings us very close to the question of *the role of art in the history of human development*.

Now that we have some preliminary definition of art, I must explain the standpoint from which I regard it.

I shall say at once and without any circumlocution that I look upon art, as upon all social phenomena, from the standpoint of the materialist conception of history.

What is the materialist conception of history?

In mathematics, as we know, there is a method known as the *reductio ad absurdum*, that is, a method of indirect proof. I shall here resort to a method which might be called *indirect explanation*. That is, I shall first explain what is the *idealist* conception of history, and shall then show wherein it differs from its opposite, the *materialist* conception of history.

The idealist conception of history, in its pure form, consists in the belief that the development of thought and knowledge is the final and ultimate cause of the movement of human history. This view fully predominated in the 18th century, whence it passed into the 19th century. It was still strongly adhered to by Saint-Simon and

* Ibid., p. 85.

Auguste Comte, although their views were in several respects the very opposite of the views held by the philosophers of the preceding century. Saint-Simon, for instance, asks how the social organization of the Greeks arose.* And he answers the question as follows: "With them, the religious system (*le système religieux*) served as the foundation of the political system. . . . The latter was patterned on the former." In proof, he cites the fact that the Olympus of the Greeks was a "republican assembly," and that the constitutions of all the Greek nations, however much they may have differed from one another, had the common feature that they were all republican.** Nor is this all. In Saint-Simon's opinion, the religious system that underlay the political system of the Greeks itself stemmed from the totality of their *scientific* concepts, from their *scientific world system*. Thus the scientific concepts of the Greeks were the underlying foundation of their social life, and the development of these concepts was the mainspring of its historical development, the chief reason which determined the replacement in the course of history of one form of social life by another.

Similarly, Auguste Comte thought that "the entire social mechanism rests, in the final analysis, on opinions."*** This is a mere reiteration of the views of the Encyclopaedists, according to whom *c'est l'opinion qui gouverne le monde* (it is opinion that governs the world).

There is another variety of idealism, one which found its extreme expression in the absolute idealism of Hegel. How is the history of man's development explained from his point of view? I shall illustrate by an example.

* The Greeks had a special importance in Saint-Simon's eyes since, in his opinion, "*c'est chez les Grecs que l'esprit humain a commencé à s'occuper sérieusement de l'organisation sociale*" ["it was with the Greeks that the human mind first began to occupy itself seriously with the organization of society"].

** See his *Mémoire sur la science de l'homme*.

*** *Course de philosophie positive*, Paris, 1869, Vol. I, pp. 40-41.

Hegel asks: what caused the fall of Greece? He gives many reasons; but the chief, in his view, is that Greece reflected only one stage in the development of the Absolute Idea, and had to fall when that stage was passed.

Clearly, in the opinion of Hegel—who however knew that "*Lacedaemon fell owing to property inequality*"—social relations and the whole history of man's development are determined in the end *by the laws of logic, by the development of thought.*

The materialist view of history is the diametrical opposite of this view. Whereas Saint-Simon, looking at history from the idealist standpoint, thought that the social relations of the Greeks were due to their religious opinions, I, a believer in the materialist view, would say that the republican Olympus of the Greeks was a reflection of their social system. And whereas Saint-Simon, in answer to the question where the religious views of the Greeks came from, replied that they stemmed from their scientific outlook on the world, I think that the scientific outlook of the Greeks was itself determined, in its historical development, by the development of the productive forces at the disposal of the Hellenic peoples.*

Such is my view of history in general. Is it correct? This is not the place to demonstrate its correctness. Here I would ask you *to assume* that it is correct and, with me, take it *as the starting-point of our inquiry on art.* Needless to say, this inquiry on the *particular question of art* will at the same time be a test of my *general view of history.* For indeed, if this general view is erroneous, we shall not, by taking it as our starting-point, get very

* Several years ago there appeared in Paris a book by A. Espinas called *Histoire de la Technologie*, which is an attempt to explain the development of the world outlook of the ancient Greeks by the development of their productive forces. It is an extremely important and interesting attempt for which we should be very grateful to Espinas, despite the fact that his inquiry is erroneous in many particulars.

far in explaining the evolution of art. But if we find that this evolution is better explained with its help than with the help of other views, we shall have a new and powerful argument in its favour.

But here I foresee an objection. In his *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, as we know, Darwin cites numerous facts showing that a fairly important role in the life of animals is played by the *sense of beauty*. These facts will be pointed to and the conclusion drawn that the origin of the sense of beauty must be explained *biologically*. I shall be told that it is impermissible ("narrow") to attribute the evolution of this sense in men *solely to the economic form of their society*. And inasmuch as Darwin's view of the evolution of species is unquestionably a materialist view, I shall also be told that biological materialism provides excellent data for a criticism of one-sided historical ("economic") materialism.

I realize the weightiness of this objection and shall therefore discuss it. This will be the more useful since, in answering it, I shall at the same time be answering a whole number of similar objections that might be borrowed from the psychological life of animals. First of all, let us try to define as accurately as possible the conclusion that should be drawn from the facts adduced by Darwin. And for this purpose, let us see what inference he draws from them himself.

In Chapter II, Part I (Russian translation) of his book on the descent of man, we read:

"Sense of Beauty.—This sense has been declared to be peculiar to man. . . . But when we behold a male bird elaborately displaying his graceful plumes or splendid colours before the female, whilst other birds, not thus decorated, make no such display, it is impossible to doubt that she admires the beauty of her male partner. As women everywhere deck themselves with these plumes, the beauty of such ornaments cannot be disputed. The nests

of humming-birds and the playing passages of bower-birds are tastefully ornamented with gaily coloured objects; and this shows that they must receive some kind of pleasure from the sight of such things. The sweet strains poured forth by many male birds, during the season of love, are certainly admired by the females. If female birds had been incapable of appreciating the beautiful colours, the ornaments, and voices of their male partners, all the labour and anxiety exhibited by the latter in displaying their charms before the females would have been thrown away; and this it is impossible to admit.

“Why certain colours should excite pleasure cannot, I presume, be explained, any more than why certain flavours and scents are agreeable.... Whether we can or not give any reason for the pleasure thus derived from vision and hearing, yet man and many of the lower animals are alike pleased by the same colours, graceful shading and forms, and the same sounds.”*

Thus the facts given by Darwin indicate that the lower animals, like man, are capable of experiencing esthetic pleasure, and that our esthetic tastes sometimes coincide with those of the lower animals.** But these facts do not explain the *origin* of these tastes.

And if biology does not explain the origin of our esthetic tastes, still less can it explain their *historical development*. But let Darwin speak again.

“The taste for the beautiful,” he continues, “at least as far as female beauty is concerned, is not of a special

* Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, St. Petersburg, 1899, Vol. I, p. 45, translation edited by Prof. I. M. Sechenov.

** In the opinion of Wallace, Darwin greatly exaggerated the importance of the esthetic sense in sexual selection of animals. Leaving it to the biologists to decide how far Wallace is right, I shall assume that Darwin's idea is absolutely correct, and you will agree, sir, that this assumption is the least favourable for my purpose.

nature in the human mind; for it differs widely in the different races of man, and is not quite the same even in the different nations of the same race. Judging from the hideous ornaments, and the equally hideous music admired by most savages, it might be urged that their esthetic faculty was not so highly developed as in certain animals, for instance, birds.”*

If the notion of beauty varies in the different nations of the same race, then obviously the reason for the variety is not to be sought in biology. Darwin himself says that our search should be directed elsewhere. In the second English edition of his book, we find in the paragraph I have just quoted the following words which are not in the Russian translation of the first English edition edited by I. M. Sechenov: “With cultivated men such (i.e., esthetic) sensations are, however, intimately associated with complex ideas and trains of thought.”**

This is an extremely important statement. It refers us from *biology* to *sociology*, for it is evident that, in Darwin’s opinion, it is social causes that determine the fact that *with cultivated men* esthetic sensations are associated with many complex ideas. But is Darwin right when he thinks that such association takes place *only* with civilized men? No, he is not, and this can easily be seen. Let us take an example. It is known that the skins, claws and teeth of animals hold a very important place in the ornaments of primitive peoples. What is the reason? Is it the combinations of colour and line in these objects? No, the fact is that the savage decks himself, say, with the skin, claws and teeth of the tiger, or the skin and horns of the buffalo as a hint at his own agility and strength: he who has vanquished the agile one, is him-

* Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (Russ. ed.), Vol. I, p. 45.

** *The Descent of Man*, London, 1883, p. 92. These words are probably in the new Russian translation of Darwin, but the book is not just now at my disposal.

self agile; he who has vanquished the strong, is himself strong. It is possible that superstition is also involved here. Schoolcraft tells us that the Red Indian tribes of western North America are extremely fond of ornaments made of the claws of the grizzly bear, the most ferocious beast of prey in those parts. The Indian warrior believes that the ferocity and courage of the grizzly bear are imparted to whoever decks himself with its claws. For him, as Schoolcraft observes, the claws are partly an ornament, partly an amulet.*

In this case of course it is impossible to conceive that the skins, claws and teeth of animals pleased the Indians originally solely because of the combinations of colour and line characteristic of these objects.** No, the contrary assumption is far more likely, namely, that these objects were first worn solely as a badge of courage, agility or strength, and only later, and precisely because they were a badge of courage, agility and strength, did they begin to excite esthetic sensations and acquire the character of ornaments. It follows, then, that with the savage esthetic ideas *may* not only be "associated" with complex ideas, but may sometimes *arise* precisely under the influence of such ideas.

Another example. It is known that the women of many African tribes wear iron rings on their arms and legs. Wives of rich men may sometimes be laden with thirty or forty pounds of such ornaments.***

This of course is inconvenient, nevertheless these chains of slavery, as Schweinfurth calls them, are worn

* Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, Vol. III, p. 216.

** There are cases when such objects please solely because of their colour, but of this later.

*** Schweinfurth, *Au cœur de l'Afrique*, Paris, 1875, Vol. I, p. 148. See also Du Chaillu, *Voyage et aventures dans l'Afrique équatoriale*, Paris, 1863, p. 11.

with pleasure. Why does the Negro woman take pleasure in wearing these heavy chains? Because, thanks to them, she seems *beautiful* to herself and to others. But why does she seem beautiful? This is the result of a fairly complex association of ideas. The passion for such ornaments is conceived by tribes which, in the words of Schweinfurth, are passing through the *iron age*, in other words, tribes with which iron is a *precious metal*. *Precious things* seem *beautiful* because they are associated with the idea of *wealth*. When a woman of the Dinka tribe puts on, say, *twenty* pounds of iron rings, she seems more beautiful to herself and to others than she did when she wore only two pounds, that is, when she was poorer. Clearly, what counts here is not the beauty of the rings, but the idea of wealth that is associated with them.

A third example. The Batokas in the upper reaches of the Zambezi consider a man ugly if his upper incisors have not been knocked out. Whence this strange conception of beauty? It arose from a fairly complex association of ideas. The Batokas knock out their upper incisors because they wish to resemble *ruminating animals*. To our minds, a rather incomprehensible wish. But the Batokas are a pastoral tribe and almost worship their cows and oxen.* Here again, that which is precious is beautiful, and esthetic concepts spring from ideas of quite a different order.

Lastly, let us take an example given by Darwin himself, quoting Livingstone. The women of the Makololo tribe perforate the upper lip and wear in the hole a large metal or bamboo ring, called a *pelele*. When a chief of the tribe was asked why the women wear these rings, he, "evidently surprised at such a stupid question," replied: "For beauty! They are the only beautiful things women have; men have beards, women have none. What kind of a person would she be without the *pelele*?" It is

* Schweinfurth, loc. cit., Vol. I, p. 148.

hard to say now where the custom of wearing the pelele came from; but, obviously, its origin must be sought in some very complex association of ideas, and not in the laws of biology, with which, apparently, it has not the slightest (direct) connection.*

In view of these examples, I consider myself entitled to affirm that the sensations excited by certain combinations of colours or forms of objects are associated even in the mind of primitive man with very complex ideas, and many, at least, of these forms and combinations seem beautiful only thanks to such association.

How is it evoked? And whence come the complex ideas which are associated with the sensations excited in us at the sight of certain objects? Evidently, these questions cannot be answered by the *biologist*; they can be answered only by the *sociologist*. And if the materialist view of history is better adapted to facilitate a solution than any other; if we find that the aforesaid associations and complex ideas are, in the final analysis, determined and shaped by the state of the productive forces of the given society and its economy, it will have to be admitted that Darwinism in no way contradicts the materialist view of history which I have tried to describe.

I cannot dwell at length here on the relation between Darwinism and this view. I shall however say a few more words on the subject.

Consider the following lines:

"It may be well first to premise that I do not wish to maintain that any strictly social animal, if its intellectual faculties were to become as active and as highly developed as in man, would acquire exactly the same moral sense as ours. In the same manner as various animals have some sense of beauty, though they admire widely different objects, so they might have a sense of

* I shall later endeavour to explain it in relation to the development of the productive forces in primitive society.

right and wrong, though led by it to follow widely different lines of conduct. If, for instance, to take an extreme case, men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters; and no one would think of interfering. Nevertheless, the bee, or any other social animal, would gain in our supposed case, as it appears to me, some feeling of right or wrong, or a conscience.”*

What follows from these words? That man's moral concepts are not *absolute*; that they change with changes in the conditions in which he lives. But what creates these conditions? What causes them to change? Darwin says nothing whatever on this point, and if we affirm and demonstrate that they are created by the state of the productive forces and change in consequence of the development of these forces, far from coming into conflict with Darwin, we shall be supplementing what he says, clarifying what he has failed to clarify, and shall be doing so by applying to the study of *social* phenomena the same principle that rendered him such immense service in *biology*.

Generally, it would be very strange to draw a contrast between Darwinism and the view of history I defend. Darwin's field was entirely different. He examined the descent of man as a *zoological species*. The supporters of the materialist view seek to explain the *historical* life of this species. Their field of investigation begins precisely where that of the Darwinists ends. Their work cannot replace what the Darwinists provide and, similarly, the most brilliant discoveries of the Darwinists cannot replace their investigations; they can only prepare the

* *The Descent of Man*, Vol. I, p. 52. (English 2nd ed., pp. 99-100.)

ground for them, just as the physicist prepares the ground for the chemist without his work in any way obviating the necessity for chemical investigations as such.* It all boils down to this. The Darwinian theory was, in its time, a big and necessary advance in the development of *biological* science, and fully satisfied the strictest demands that could then have been made of this science by its devotees. Can this be said of the materialist view of history? Can it be affirmed that it was in its time a big and inevitable advance in the development of social science? And is it now capable of satisfying all the demands of this science? To this I reply: Yes, and yes

* I must here make a reservation. When I maintain that Darwinian biologists prepare the ground for sociological inquiries, this must be understood only in the sense that the achievements of biology—in so far as it is concerned with the development of *organic forms*—cannot but contribute to the perfection of the scientific method in sociology, in so far as the latter is concerned with the development of the social organization and its products: human thoughts and emotions. But I do not share the social views of Darwinists like Haeckel. It has already been pointed out in our literature that the Darwinian biologists do not employ the Darwinian *method* in their discussions of human society, and only elevate to an ideal the instincts of the animals (principally beasts of prey) which were the object of the great biologist's investigations. Darwin was far from being *sattelfest* (well-grounded) in social questions; but the social views which he conceived as deductions from his theory little resemble those which the majority of Darwinists deduce from it. Darwin believed that the social instincts were developed "*for the general good of the species.*" This view cannot be shared by Darwinists who preach a *social struggle of each against all*. True, Darwin says that "there should be open competition for all men and the most able should not be prevented by laws and customs from succeeding best and reaching the largest number of offspring." But these words are quoted in vain by the believers in a social war of each against all. Let them remember the Saint-Simonists. They, like Darwin, also spoke of competition, but in the name of competition they demanded social reforms which would hardly have been favoured by Haeckel and his followers. There is competition and competition, just as, in the words of Sganarelle, there are fagots and fagots.

again! And in these letters I hope to demonstrate, in part, that this confidence is not unfounded.

But let us return to esthetics. It is apparent from the words of Darwin I have quoted that he regarded the development of *esthetic taste* from the same standpoint as the development of the *moral sense*. Men, and many animals, have a sense of the beautiful, that is, they have the faculty of experiencing a particular kind of pleasure ("esthetic") under the influence of certain objects and phenomena. But exactly which objects and phenomena afford them this pleasure depends on the conditions in which they grow up, live and function. It is because of *human nature* that man *may have* esthetic tastes and concepts. *It is the conditions surrounding him* that determine the conversion of this *possibility into a reality*; they explain why a given social man (that is, a given society, a given people, or class) possesses *particular* tastes and concepts *and not others*.

This is the ultimate conclusion that follows automatically from what Darwin says on the subject. And this conclusion, of course, none of the believers in the materialist view of history would contest. Quite the contrary, they would all see in it a new confirmation of this view. It has surely never occurred to any of them to deny any of the social properties of human nature, or to interpret it in any arbitrary manner. All they said was that, if human nature is unchangeable, it cannot explain the historical process, which represents an aggregation of constantly *changing* phenomena, but that if, with the course of historical development, it *changes* itself, then obviously there must be an external reason for its changes. It therefore follows that in either case the task of the historian and the sociologist consists in something far more than discussing the properties of human nature.

Let us take such a property of human nature as *imitation*. Tarde, who has written a very interesting essay on

the laws of imitation, regards it as the soul of society. As he defines it, every social group is an aggregation of beings who partly imitate one another at the present time, and partly imitated one and the same model in the past. That imitation has played a very big part in the history of all our ideas, tastes, manners and customs is beyond the slightest doubt. Its immense importance was already emphasized by the materialists of the last century: man consists entirely of imitation, Helvetius said. But it is just as little to be doubted that Tarde based his investigation of the laws of imitation on a false premise.

When the restoration of the Stuarts in Britain temporarily re-established the rule of the old nobility, the latter, far from betraying the slightest tendency *to imitate* the extreme representatives of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie, the *Puritans*, evinced a very strong inclination for habits and tastes that were the *very opposite* of the Puritan rules of life. The strict morals of the Puritans gave way to the most incredible licentiousness. It became good form to like, and to do, the very things the Puritans forbade. The Puritans were very religious; high society at the time of the Restoration flaunted its impiety. The Puritans persecuted the theatre and literature; their downfall was the signal for a new and powerful infatuation for the theatre and literature. The Puritans wore short hair and condemned refinement in dress; after the Restoration, long wigs and luxurious costumes came into fashion. The Puritans forbade card games; after the Restoration, gambling became a passion, and so on and so forth.* In a word, what operated here was not *imitation*, but *contradiction*, which evidently is likewise rooted in the properties of human nature. But why did this tendency to contradiction which is rooted in the properties of

* Cf. Alexandre Beljame, *Le Public et les Hommes de Lettres en Angleterre du dix-huitième siècle*, Paris, 1881, pp. 1-10. See also Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, Vol. II, p. 443 et seq.

human nature manifest itself so powerfully in the relations between the bourgeoisie and the nobility in 17th-century Britain? Because it was a century of very acute struggle between the nobility and the bourgeoisie, or, more correctly, between the nobility and the "third estate" generally. We may consequently say that, though man undoubtedly has a strong tendency to imitation, it manifests itself only in definite *social relationships*, for example, those which existed in France in the 17th century, when the bourgeoisie readily, though not very successfully, imitated the nobility: recall Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. In other social relationships the tendency to imitation vanishes and gives place to its opposite, which for the present I shall call the tendency to *contradiction*.

But no, I am putting it incorrectly. The tendency to imitation did not vanish among the Englishmen of the 17th century: it probably manifested itself with all its former power in the relations between members of *one and the same class*. Beljame says of English high society of that period: "these people were not even unbelievers; they denied religion a priori, so as not to be taken for Roundheads, and not to give themselves the trouble to think."* Of these people, it may be said without fear of error that they denied religion from *imitation*. But in *imitating* more serious atheists, they were *contradicting the Puritans*. *Imitation was thus a source of contradiction*. But we know that if the weaker minds among the English nobles *imitated* the atheism of the stronger, this was because atheism was good form, and it became so only by virtue of *contradiction*, solely as a reaction to Puritanism—a reaction which in its turn was a result of the aforesaid *class struggle*. Hence, *beneath all this complex dialectic of mental phenomena lay facts of a*

* Alexandre Beljame, *Le Public et les Hommes de Lettres en Angleterre du dix-huitième siècle*, Paris, 1881, pp. 7-8.

social character. And this makes it clear to what extent, and in what sense, the conclusion I have drawn from some of Darwin's statements is correct, the conclusion, namely, that it is because of human nature that man *may* have certain concepts (or tastes, or inclinations), but that the conversion of this *possibility into a reality* depends on the conditions surrounding him; it is because of these conditions that he has particular concepts (or inclinations, or tastes) and not others. If I am not mistaken, this is exactly what was said before me by a certain Russian partisan of the materialist view of history.

“Once the stomach has been supplied with a quantity of food, it sets to work in accordance with the general laws of digestion. But can these laws provide the answer to the question why tasty and nourishing food is inserted into your stomach every day, whereas with mine it is a rare guest? Can these laws explain why some eat too much while others die of starvation? This explanation, it would seem, must be sought in another sphere, in the operation of laws of a different kind. So with the mind of man. Once it is put in a certain situation, once its environment provides it with certain impressions, it combines them in accordance with certain general laws; and here, too, the results differ extremely, varying with the impressions received. But what puts it in this situation? What determines the flow and character of the new impressions? This is a question which no laws of thought can decide.

“And further. Imagine an elastic ball falling from a high tower. Its movement is governed by a generally known and very simple *law of mechanics*. But the ball strikes an inclined plane, and its movement changes in accordance with another, also very simple and generally known *mechanical law*. As a result, we have a broken line, of which we can and must say that it is due to the combined action of the two mentioned laws. But the inclined plane which the ball struck, where did it come

from? This is not to be explained either by the first or the second law, or by their combined action. So it is with the human mind. What produced the circumstances, by virtue of which its movements submitted to the combined action of such and such laws? This is not explained either by its individual laws, or by their combined action."

I am firmly convinced that the history of ideology can be understood only by people who have thoroughly grasped this plain and simple truth.

Let us proceed. When speaking of imitation, I referred to the very opposite tendency, which I called contradiction.

It must be examined more closely.

We know how great a role is played in the expression of the emotions in man and animals by what Darwin calls the "*principle of antithesis*." "Certain states of mind lead . . . to certain habitual movements which were primarily, or may still be, of service; and we shall find that when a directly opposite state of mind is induced, there is a strong and involuntary tendency to the performance of movements of a directly opposite nature, though these have never been of any service."* Darwin cites many examples which show very convincingly that the "principle, of antithesis", does indeed account for a great deal in the expression of the emotions. I ask, is not its action to be observed in the origin and development of *customs*?

When a dog throws itself belly upwards at the feet of its master, its posture is as completely opposite as possible to any show of resistance and is an expression of complete submissiveness. Here the operation of the principle of antithesis is strikingly apparent. I think, however, that it is equally apparent in the following case

* *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Russ. trans., St. Petersburg, 1872, p. 43.

reported by the traveller Burton. When Negroes of the *Wanyamwezi* tribe pass by a village inhabited by a hostile tribe, they do not carry arms so as to avoid provocation. But at home every one of them is always armed with at least a knobstick.* If, as Darwin observes, the dog which throws itself on its back seems to be saying to a man, or a strange dog, "Behold, I am your slave!"—the Wanyamwezi Negro, in laying aside his weapons at a time when arming would appear essential, thereby intimates to his enemy: "Nothing is farther from my thought than self-defence; I fully trust in your magnanimity."

The thought is the same in both cases—and so is its expression, that is, through an action that is the direct opposite of that which would have been inevitable if, instead of submissiveness, there had been hostile intent.

We also find the principle of antithesis manifested with striking clarity in customs which serve for the expression of grief. David and Charles Livingstone relate that no Negro woman ever appears in public without wearing ornaments, *except in times of mourning for the dead.* **

The coiffure of a Niam-Niam Negro is the object of great care and attention on the part of both himself and his wives, yet he will at once cut it off in token of grief when a near relative dies.*** In Africa, according to Du Chaillu, many *Negro peoples put on dirty clothing* on the death of a man who held an important position in the tribe.**** Some of the natives of Borneo express their grief by laying aside the *cotton sarong* they ordinarily wear and putting on *clothes of bark*, which used to be

* *Voyage aux grands lacs de l'Afrique orientale*, Paris, 1862, p. 610. [*The Lake Region of Central Africa*, Vol. II, p. 301.]

** *Exploration du Zambèze et de ses affluents*, Paris, 1866, p. 109. [*Expedition to the Zambezi*, p. 115.]

*** Schweinfurth, *Au cœur de l'Afrique*, Vol. II, p. 33.

**** *Voyage et aventures l'Afrique équatoriale*, p. 268.

worn formerly.* With the same object, some of the Mongolian tribes turn their clothing *inside out*.** In all these cases, emotion is expressed *by actions which are the opposite of those that are considered natural, necessary, useful or pleasant in the normal course of life*.

In the normal course of life it is considered useful to replace dirty clothing by clean; but in time of mourning, by virtue of the principle of antithesis, clean clothing is exchanged for dirty clothing. The foresaid inhabitants of Borneo found it gratifying to wear cotton clothes instead of clothes of bark; but the principle of antithesis induces them to wear bark clothing when they want to express grief. The Mongolians, like all other peoples, naturally wear their clothes the right way out, but for the very reason that this seems natural to them in the ordinary course of life, they turn them inside out when the ordinary course of life is disturbed by some mournful event. And here is an even more striking example. Schweinfurth says that many African Negroes express grief *by putting a rope round their neck*.*** Here grief is expressed by an emotion that is the very opposite of that suggested by the instinct of self-preservation. Very many examples of this kind could be cited.

I am therefore convinced that a very substantial proportion of our customs owe their origin to the principle of antithesis.

If my conviction is justified—and I believe it is fully justified—we may presume that the development of our *esthetic tastes* is likewise, in part, prompted by its influence. Is this presumption corroborated by the facts? I think it is.

In Senegambia, wealthy Negro women wear shoes so small that they cannot accommodate the whole foot, by

* Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, Vol. I, Introduction, p. 65.

** Ratzel, loc. cit., Vol. II, p. 347.

*** *Au cœur de l'Afrique*, Vol. I, p. 151.

reason of which these ladies are distinguished by a very awkward gait. But this gait is considered extremely attractive.*

How could it have come to be so regarded?

In order to understand this, it must first be observed that such shoes are not worn by poor Negro women who have to work, and they have an ordinary gait. They cannot walk in the way the rich coquettes do because this would result in great loss of time; the awkward gait of the wealthy women seems attractive precisely because they do not value time, they being exempted from the necessity of working. In itself, this gait has no sense whatever; it acquires significance *only by virtue of its contrast to the gait of the women burdened with work (and, hence, poor)*.

Here the operation of the "*principle of antithesis*" is plain. But mark that it is induced by *social causes*, namely, the existence of property inequality among the Senegambia Negroes.

Recalling what was said above about the morals of the English nobility at the time of the Restoration, I hope you will readily agree that the tendency to contradiction they reveal represents a particular instance of the action of *Darwin's principle of antithesis in social psychology*. But here another point should be observed.

Such virtues as industriousness, patience, sobriety, thrift, strict domestic morals, etc., were very useful to the British bourgeoisie when it was seeking to win a more exalted position in society. But vices that were the opposite of the bourgeois virtues were useless, to say the least, to the British nobility in its struggle for survival against the bourgeoisie. They did not provide it with any new weapons in this struggle, and arose only as a psychological result. What was useful to the British nobility

* L. J. B. Béranger-Féraud, *Les peuplades de la Sénégambie*, Paris, 1879, p. 11.

was not its inclination for vices that were the opposite of the bourgeois virtues, but rather the emotion that prompted this inclination, namely, hatred of a class whose complete triumph would signify the equally complete abolition of the privileges of the aristocracy. The inclination for vice was only a *correlative variation* (if I may here use a term borrowed from Darwin). Such *correlative* variations are quite common in social psychology. They must be taken into account. But it is just as necessary to bear in mind that they too, *in the final analysis*, are induced by social causes.

We know from the history of English literature how strongly the esthetic concepts of the upper class were affected by the psychological operation of the principle of antithesis to which I have referred, and which was evoked by the class struggle. British aristocrats who lived in France during their exile became acquainted with French literature and the French theatre, which were an exemplary and unique product of a refined aristocratic society, and therefore were far more in harmony with their own aristocratic inclinations than the English theatre and English literature of Elizabethan times. After the Restoration, the English stage and English literature fell under the domination of French taste. Shakespeare was scorned in the same way as he was subsequently scorned, when they came to know him, by the French, who adhered to the classical tradition—that is, as a “*drunken savage*.” His *Romeo and Juliet* was considered “*bad*,” and his *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, “*ridiculous and insipid*”; his *Henry VIII* was “*a simple thing*,” his *Othello*, “*a mean thing*.”* This attitude did not fully disappear even in the following century. Hume thought that Shakespeare’s dramatic genius was commonly overrated for the same reason that deformed and disproportionate bodies give the impression of being very large. He accused the great

* Beljame, *ibid.*, pp. 40-41. Cf. Taine, *loc. cit.*, pp. 508-12.

dramatist of "total ignorance of all theatrical art and conduct." Pope regretted that Shakespeare wrote "for the people" and managed to get along without "the protection of his prince and the encouragement of the court." Even the celebrated *Garrick*, an ardent admirer of Shakespeare, strove to *ennoble* his "idol." In his performances of *Hamlet* he omitted the gravediggers' scene as being too coarse. He supplied *King Lear* with a happy ending. But the *democratic* section of the English theatre-going public continued to cherish the warmest regard for Shakespeare. Garrick was aware that in adapting his plays, he was incurring the risk of evoking the stormy protest of this section of the public. His French friends, in their letters, complimented him for the "courage" with which he faced this danger: "Car je connais la populace anglaise," one of them added.*

The laxity of aristocratic morals in the second half of the 17th century was, as we know, reflected on the English stage, where it assumed truly incredible proportions. Nearly all the comedies written in England between 1660 and 1690 were almost without exception what Eduard Engel calls pornographic.** In view of this, it might be said a priori that sooner or later, in accordance with the principle of antithesis, a type of dramatic works was bound to appear in England whose chief purpose would be to depict and extol the domestic virtues and middle-class purity of morals. And in due course this type really was produced by the intellectual representatives of the English bourgeoisie. But I shall have to speak of this type of dramatic works later, when I discuss the French "*tearful comedy*."²

As far as I know, the importance of the principle of antithesis in the history of esthetic concepts was noted

* "For I know the English mob." On this point, see the interesting inquiry of J. J. Jusserand, *Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien régime*, Paris, 1898, pp. 247-48.

** *Geschichte der englischen Literatur*, 3rd ed., Leipzig, 1897.

most keenly and defined most cleverly by Hippolyte Taine.*

In his witty and interesting *Voyage aux Pyrénées*, he describes a conversation he had with a "table companion," Monsieur Paul who, to all appearances, expresses the views of the author himself: "You are going to Versailles," Monsieur Paul says, "and you cry out against 17th-century taste. . . . But cease for a moment to judge from your needs and habits of today. . . . We are right when we admire wild scenery, just as they were right when they were bored by such landscapes. Nothing was more ugly in the 17th century than real mountains.** They evoked in them many unpleasant ideas. People who had just emerged from an era of civil war and semi-barbarism were reminded by them of hunger, of long journeys on horseback in rain and snow, of inferior black bread mixed with chaff, of filthy, vermin-ridden hostleries. They were tired of barbarism, as we are tired of civilization. . . . These . . . mountains give us a respite from our sidewalks, our offices and our shops. Wild scenery pleases us only for this reason. And if it were not for this reason, it would be just as repulsive to us as it was to Madame de Maintenon."***

A wild landscape pleases us because of its contrast to the urban scenes of which we are tired. Urban scenes and formal gardens pleased 17th-century people because of their contrast to wild places. Here the operation of the

* Tarde had an excellent opportunity to investigate the psychological operation of this principle in his *L'opposition universelle, essai d'une Théorie des Contraires*, which appeared in 1897. But for some reason he did not utilize the opportunity, and confined himself to very few remarks on the subject. True, he says (p. 245) that this book is not a sociological essay. But he probably would not have coped with the subject even in an essay specifically devoted to sociology, if he did not abandon his idealist outlook.

** Do not forget that this conversation takes place in the Pyrenees.

*** *Voyage aux Pyrénées*, cinquième édition, Paris, pp. 190-93.

"principle of antithesis" is unquestionable. But just because it is unquestionable, it is a clear illustration of the way psychological laws may serve as a key to the history of ideology in general, and to the history of art in particular.

The principle of antithesis played the same role in the psychology of the people of the 17th century as it plays in the psychology of our contemporaries. Why, then, are our esthetic tastes the opposite of those of 17th-century people?

Because we live in an entirely different situation. We are thus brought back to our familiar conclusion, namely, that it is because of man's nature that he may have esthetic concepts, and that Darwin's *principle of antithesis* (Hegel's "contradiction") plays an extremely important and hitherto insufficiently appreciated role in the mechanism of these concepts. But why a particular social man has particular tastes and not others, why certain objects and not others afford him pleasure, depends on the surrounding conditions. The example given by Taine also provides a good indication of the character of these conditions; it shows that they are social conditions which, in their aggregate, are determined—I put it vaguely for the time being—by the development of human culture.*

* Already on the lowest rungs of civilization, the psychological principle of contradiction is brought into operation by division of labour between man and woman. V. I. Jochelson says that "typical of the primitive system of the Yukagirs is the opposition between men and women, as two separate groups. This is likewise to be seen in their games, in which the men and the women constitute two hostile parties; in their language, certain sounds being pronounced by the women differently than the men; in the fact that descent by the maternal line is more important to the women, and by the paternal line to the men, and in that specialization of occupations which has created a special, independent sphere of activity for each sex." (*On the Rivers Yasachnaya and Korkodon, Ancient Yukagir Life and Literature*, St. Petersburg, 1898, p. 5.)

Here I foresee an objection on your part. You will say: "Let us grant that the example given by Taine does point to *social* conditions as the cause which brings the basic laws of our psychology into operation; let us grant that the examples you yourself gave point to the same thing. But is it not possible to cite examples that prove something quite different? Are we not familiar with examples which show that the laws of our psychology begin to operate under the influence of *surrounding nature*?"

Of course we are, I answer; and even the example given by Taine relates to our attitude towards impressions produced on us by *nature*. But the whole point is that the influence exerted upon us by these impressions changes as our attitude towards nature changes, and the latter is determined by the development of our (that is, social) culture.

The example given by Taine refers to *landscape*. Mark, sir, that landscape has not by any means occupied a constant place in the history of painting. Michelangelo and his contemporaries ignored it. It began to flourish in

Mr. Jochelson does not appear to observe that specialization in the occupations of the sexes was the cause of the contrast he notes, not the other way round.

That this contrast is reflected in the ornaments of the different sexes, is attested by many travellers. For example: "Here, as everywhere, the stronger sex assiduously tries to distinguish itself from the other, and the male toilet is markedly different from the female (Schweinfurth, *Au cœur de l'Afrique*, Vol. II, p. 281), and whereas the men devote considerable labour to their hairdress, the coiffure of the women is quite simple and modest" (*ibid.*, II, p. 5). For the influence on *dances* of division of labour between men and women, see von den Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Braziliens*, Berlin, 1894, p. 298. It may be said with confidence that man's desire to distinguish himself from *woman* appears earlier than the desire to contrast himself to the *lower animals*. Surely, in this instance, the fundamental properties of human psychology find rather paradoxical expression.

Italy only at the very end of the Renaissance, at the moment of its decline.

Nor did it have an independent significance for the French artists of the 17th, and even the 18th centuries. The situation changed abruptly in the 19th century, when landscape began to be valued for its own sake, and young artists—Flers, Cabat, Théodore Rousseau—sought in the lap of Nature, in the environs of Paris, in Fontainebleau and Melun, inspiration the possibility of which was not even suspected by artists of the time of Le Brun or Boucher. Why? Because social relations in France had changed, and this was followed by a change in the psychology of the French. Thus in different periods of social development man receives different impressions from Nature, because he looks at it from different viewpoints.

The operation of the general laws of man's psychical nature does not cease, of course, in any of these periods. But as in the various periods, owing to the different social relations, the material that enters man's head is not alike, it is not surprising that the end results are not alike either.

One more example. Some writers have expressed the thought that everything in a man's external appearance that resembles the features of lower animals seems to us ugly. This is true of civilized peoples, though even with them there are quite a number of exceptions: a "leonine head" does not seem unsightly to any of us. But notwithstanding such exceptions, it may be affirmed that when man comes to realize that he is an incomparably higher being than any of his kindred in the animal world, he fears to resemble them and even endeavours *to underline, to exaggerate* the dissimilarity.*

* "In dieser Idealisierung der Natur liess sich die Sculptur von Fingerzeigen der Natur selbst leiten: sie überschätzte hauptsächlich Merkmale, die den Menschen vom Tiere unterscheiden. Die aufrechte Stellung führte zu grösserer Schlankheit und Länge der

But this assertion is not true of primitive peoples. We know that some of them knock out their upper incisors in order to resemble ruminating animals, others file them in order to resemble beasts of prey, others still plait their hair into the shape of horns, and so on almost ad infinitum.*

Often this tendency to imitate animals is connected with the religious beliefs of primitive peoples.**

But that does not alter things in the least.

Beine, die zunehmende Steile des Schädelwinkels in dem Tierreiche zur Bildung des griechischen Profils, der allgemeine schon von Winkelmann ausgesprochene Grundsatz, dass die Natur, wo sie Flächen unterbreche, dies nicht stumpf, sondern mit Entschiedenheit tue, liess die scharfen Ränder der Augenhöhle und der Nasenbeine, so wie den ebenso scharfgerandeten Schnitt der Lippen vorziehen." ["In its idealization of Nature, sculpture was guided by the finger of Nature itself: it chiefly overvalued features which distinguish man from the animal. The erect stature led to greater slenderness and length of leg, the increasing steepness of the cranial angle in the animal kingdom, to the evolution of the Greek profile, while the general law, already formulated by Winkelmann, that when Nature breaks surfaces she does so not bluntly but decisively, led to a preference for sharply rimmed eye-sockets and nose bones, as well as for a sharply curved cut of the lips."] Lotze, *Geschichte der Aesthetik in Deutschland*, Munich, 1868, p. 568.

* The missionary Heckewelder relates that he once went to see an Indian of his acquaintance and found him preparing for the dance, which, as we know, is of important social significance with primitive peoples. The Indian had painted his face in the following intricate manner: "When we viewed him in profile on one side, his nose represented the beak of an eagle. . . . When we turned round to the other side, the same nose now resembled the snout of a pike. . . . He seemed much pleased with his execution, and having his looking-glass with him, he contemplated his work, seemingly with great pride and exultation." *Histoire, mœurs et coutumes des nations indiennes, qui habitaient autrefois la Pensylvanie et les états voisins*, par le révérend Jean Heckewelder, missionnaire morave, trad. de l'anglais par le chevalier Du Ponceau. A Paris, 1822, p. 324. I have written out the title of this book in full because it contains much interesting information and I want to recommend it to the reader. I shall have other occasions to refer to it.

** Cf. J. G. Frazer, *Le Tolémisme*, Paris, 1898, pp. 39 et seq. Schweinfurth, *Au cœur de l'Afrique*, Vol. I, p. 381.

For if primitive man had looked on lower animals with *our eyes*, they would probably have found no place in his religious ideas. He looks at them differently. Why differently? Because *he stands on a different level of culture*. Hence, if in one case man strives to resemble lower animals and in another to differentiate himself from them, this depends on the state of his culture, that is, again on those *social* conditions to which I have referred. Here, however, I can express myself more precisely: I would say that it depends on the degree of development of his productive forces, on his *mode of production*. And in order not to be accused of exaggeration and "one-sidedness," I shall let von den Steinen, the learned German traveller I have already quoted, speak for me. "We shall only then understand these people," he says of the Brazilian Indians, "when we regard them as the product of the hunter's way of life. An important part of their experience is associated with the animal world, and it was on the basis of this experience that their outlook was formed. Correspondingly, their art motifs, too, are borrowed with tedious uniformity from the animal world. It may be said that all their wonderfully rich art is rooted in their life as hunters.*"

Chernyshevsky once wrote, in his dissertation on *The Esthetic Relation Between Art and Reality*: "What pleases us in plants is their freshness of colour and luxuriant abundance of form, for they reveal a life full of strength and freshness. A withering plant is unpleasant; so is a plant which has little vital sap." Chernyshevsky's dissertation is an extremely interesting and unique example of the application of the principles of Feuerbachian materialism to esthetic problems.

But history was always a weak point with this materialism, and this is clearly to be seen in the lines I have just quoted: "What pleases us in plants...."

* Op. cit., p. 201.

Who is meant by "us?" The tastes of men vary extremely, as Chernyshevsky himself pointed out many a time in this same work. We know that primitive tribes—the Bushmen and Australians, for example—never adorn themselves with flowers although they live in countries where flowers abound. It is said that the Tasmanians were an exception in this respect, but it is no longer possible to verify the truth of this statement: the Tasmanians are extinct. At any rate, it is very well known that the *ornamental art* of primitive—more exactly, *hunting*—peoples borrows its motifs from the *animal* world, and that plants have no place in them. And modern science attributes this, too, to nothing but the state of the productive forces.

"The ornamental motifs borrowed by hunting tribes from nature," says Ernst Grosse, "consist exclusively of animal and human forms. Thus they select those things which are to them of greatest practical interest. The primitive hunter leaves the gathering of plants, which is also of course necessary for him, to his womenfolk, as an inferior occupation, and shows no interest in it whatever. This explains why we do not find in his ornaments even a trace of the plant motifs which are so richly developed in the decorative art of civilized peoples. Actually, the transition from animal to plant ornaments is symbolical of a great advance in the history of civilization—the transition from hunting to agriculture."*

So clearly does primitive art reflect the state of the productive forces that in doubtful cases the state of these forces is now judged from the art. The Bushmen, for example, draw human and animal forms very readily and comparatively well. Some grottoes in their places of habitation are regular picture galleries. But the Bushmen never draw plants. In the only known exception to this general rule—a depiction of a hunter hiding behind a bush—the clumsy way in which the *bush* is drawn shows

* *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, p. 149.

most effectively how unusual this subject was for the primitive artist. Some ethnologists conclude from this that if the Bushmen did at one time stand at a somewhat higher level of culture than they do now—which, generally speaking, is not impossible—they were certainly never familiar with *agriculture*.*

If all this is true, we can now modify as follows the conclusion we drew from Darwin's words: it is the psychological nature of primitive man which determines that he may have esthetic tastes and concepts generally, but it is the state of his productive forces, his hunter's mode of life, which leads to his acquiring particular esthetic tastes and concepts, and not others. This conclusion, while throwing vivid light on the art of the hunting tribes, is at the same time another argument in favour of the materialist view of history.

With civilized peoples the technique of production exercises a direct influence on art far more rarely. This fact, which would seem to testify against the materialist view of history, actually provides brilliant confirmation of it. But we shall leave this point for another occasion.

I shall now pass to another psychological law which has played a big role in the history of art and which has likewise not received the attention it deserves.

Burton says of certain African Negroes he knew that they had a poorly developed sense of music, but were nevertheless astonishingly sensitive to rhythm: "the fisherman will accompany his paddle, the porter his trudge, and the housewife her task of rubbing down grain, with song."** Casalis says the same thing of the Kaffirs of the *Basuto* tribe, whom he studied very thoroughly. "The women of this tribe wear metal rings on their arms which jangle at every movement. They not infrequently gather together to grind their corn on the handmills, and

* See Raoul Allier's interesting introduction to Frédéric Christol's *Au sud de l'Afrique*, Paris, 1897.

** Loc. cit., p. 602.

accompany the measured movement of the arms with a chant which strictly corresponds to the rhythmical sound emitted by the bracelets."* The men of this tribe, Casalis says, when they are at work softening hides, "at every movement utter a strange sound, whose significance I was unable to elucidate."** What this tribe likes particularly in music is rhythm, and they enjoy most those songs in which it is most strongly marked.*** In their dances the Basutos beat time with their hands and feet, intensifying the sound thus produced with the help of rattles hung around their bodies.**** The Brazilian Indians likewise reveal a strong sense of *rhythm* in their music, but are very weak in *melody* and apparently have not the slightest idea of *harmony*.*¹) The same must be said of the Australian aborigines.**²) In a word, rhythm has a colossal significance with all primitive peoples. Sensitivity to rhythm, and musical ability generally, seem to constitute one of the principal properties of the psycho-physiological nature of man. And not only of man. Darwin says that the ability at least to perceive, if not to enjoy, musical time and rhythm is apparently common to all animals and is undoubtedly connected with the physiological nature of their nervous system.***³) In view of this, it might be presumed that the appearance of this ability, which man shares with other animals, was not connected with the conditions of his social life in general, or with the state of his productive forces in partic-

* *Les Bassoutos* par E. Casalis, ancien missionnaire, Paris, 1863, p. 150.

** Ibid., p. 141.

*** Ibid., p. 157.

**** Ibid., p. 158.

*¹) Von den Steinen, loc. cit., p. 326.

**²) See E. J. Eyre, "Manners and Customs of the Aborigines of Australia," in *Journal of Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia and Overland*, London, 1847, Vol. II, p. 229. Cf. also Grosse, *Anfänge der Kunst*, p. 271.

***³) *The Descent of Man*, [Russ. trans.], Vol. II, p. 252.

ular. But although this presumption may appear very natural at a first glance, it will not stand the criticism of facts. Science has shown that such a connection does exist. And mark, sir, that science has done so in the person of a most distinguished *economist*—*Karl Bücher*.

As is apparent from the facts I have quoted, it is because of man's ability to perceive and enjoy rhythm that the primitive producer readily conforms in the course of his work to a definite time, and accompanies his bodily movements with measured sounds of the voice or the rhythmical clang of objects suspended from his person. But what determines the time observed by the primitive producer? Why do his bodily movements in the process of production conform to a particular measure, and not another? This depends on the *technological character of the given production process, on the technique of the given form of production*. With primitive tribes each kind of work has its own chant, whose tune is precisely adapted to the rhythm of the production movements characteristic of that kind of work.* With the development of the productive forces the importance of rhythmic activity in the production process diminishes, but even with civilized peoples—the German peasants, for example—each season of the year, according to Bücher, has its own work sounds, and each kind of work its own music.**

It should also be observed that, depending on how the work is done—whether by one producer or by a body—songs arise either for one singer or for a whole choir, and the latter kind are likewise divided into several categories. And in all cases, the rhythm of the song is strictly determined by the rhythm of the production process. Nor is this all. The technological character of the process has a decisive influence also on the *content* of the song accompanying the work. A study of the

* K. Bücher, *Arbeit und Rhythmus*, Leipzig, 1896, pp. 21, 22, 23, 35, 50, 53, 54; Burton, loc. cit., p. 641.

** Bücher, *ibid.*, p. 29.

interconnection between work, music and poetry leads Bücher to the conclusion that "in the early stage of their development work, music and poetry were intimately connected with one another, but the basic element in this trinity was work, the other elements having only a subordinate significance."*

Since the sounds which accompany many production processes have a musical effect in themselves, and since, moreover, the chief thing in music for primitive peoples is *rhythm*, it is not difficult to understand how their simple musical productions were elaborated from the sounds resulting from the impact of the *instruments* of labour on their *object*. This was done by accentuating these sounds, by introducing a certain variety into their rhythm, and generally by adapting them to express human emotions.** But for this, it was first necessary to modify the *instruments of labour*, which in this way became transformed into *musical instruments*.

The first to undergo such transformation must have been instruments with which the producer simply *struck* the object of his labour. We know that the *drum* is extremely widespread among primitive peoples, and is still the only musical instrument of some of them. String instruments originally belonged to the same category, for the primitive musicians *play* upon them *by striking the strings*. Wind instruments hold a minor place with them: the most frequent to be met with is the flute, which is often played as an accompaniment to work performed in common, in order to lend it a rhythmic regularity.*** I cannot discuss here in detail Bücher's views concerning the origin of poetry; it will be more convenient to do so in a subsequent letter.³ I shall only say briefly that Bücher is convinced that it originated from energetic rhythmical movements of the body, especially the movements which

* Bücher, *ibid.*, p. 78.

** *Ibid.*, p. 91.

*** *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

we call work, and that this is true not only of poetical *form*, but also of *content*.*

If Bücher's remarkable conclusions are correct, then we are entitled to say that man's nature (the physiological nature of his nervous system) gave him the ability to perceive musical rhythm and to enjoy it, while his technique of production determined the subsequent development of this ability.

The close connection between the state of the productive forces of the so-called primitive peoples and their art had been recognized by investigators long ago. But as the vast majority of them adhered to an idealist standpoint, they, as it were, recognized this connection despite themselves and explained it incorrectly. For example, the well-known historian of art, Wilhelm Lübke, says that the art productions of primitive peoples bear the stamp of *natural necessity*, whereas those of the civilized nations are infused with *intellectual consciousness*. This differentiation rests on nothing but idealist prejudice. In reality, the art of civilized peoples is no less under the sway of necessity than primitive art. The only difference is that with civilized peoples the *direct dependence* of art on technology and mode of production disappears. I know, of course, that this is a very big difference. But I also know that it is determined by nothing else than the development of the social productive forces, which leads to the division of social labour among different classes. Far from refuting the materialist view of the history of art, it provides convincing evidence in its favour.

I shall also point to the "law of symmetry." Its importance is great and unquestionable. In what is it rooted? Probably in the structure of man's own body, likewise the bodies of animals: only the bodies of cripples and deformed persons are unsymmetrical, and they must

* Ibid., p. 80.

always have produced an unpleasant impression on physically normal people. Hence, the ability to enjoy symmetry was likewise imparted to us by nature. But we cannot say how far this ability would have developed if it had not been strengthened and fostered by the very mode of life of the primitive peoples. We know that primitive man was principally a hunter. One effect of this mode of life, as we have already learned, is that motifs borrowed from the animal world predominate in his ornamental art. And this induces the primitive artist—already from a very early age—to pay attentive heed to the law of symmetry.*

That man's sense of symmetry is trained precisely on these models, is to be seen from the fact that savages (and not only savages) have a preference in their ornamental art for *horizontal*, rather than *vertical* symmetry:** glance at the figure of the first man or animal you meet (not deformed, of course), and you will see that its symmetry is of the former, not the latter type. It should also be borne in mind that weapons and utensils often required a symmetrical shape because of their very character and purpose. Lastly, as Grosse quite rightly observes, if the Australian savage, when ornamenting his shield, is just as cognizant of the importance of symmetry as were the highly civilized builders of the Parthenon, then it is

* I say from a very early age, because with primitive peoples children's games likewise serve as a school for the training of artistic talent. According to the missionary Christol (*Au sud de l'Afrique*, p. 95 et seq.), children of the Basuto tribe themselves fashion from clay toy oxen, horses, etc. Needless to say, these childish sculptures leave much to be desired, but civilized children cannot compare in this respect with the little African "savages." In primitive society the amusements of the children are intimately associated with the productive pursuits of the adults. This throws vivid light on the relation of "*play*" to social life, as I shall show in a subsequent letter.⁴

** See the designs of the Australian shields in Grosse, *Anfänge der Kunst*, p. 145.

obvious that the sense of symmetry cannot in itself explain the history of art, and that we must say in this case as in all others: it is nature that imparts an ability to man, but the exercise and practical application of this ability is determined by the development of his culture.

Here again I deliberately employ a vague expression: *culture*. You will, on reading it, exclaim with heat: "Nobody has ever denied this! All we say is that the development of culture is not determined solely by the development of the productive forces, by economics!"

Alas, I am only too well acquainted with this kind of objection. And I confess that I have never been able to understand why even intelligent people fail to observe the frightful logical blunder that lies at the bottom of it.

For indeed, you, sir, would like the development of culture to be determined by other "factors" as well. I ask: is art one of them? You will, of course, say that it is, whereupon we get the following situation: the development of human culture is determined, among other things, by the development of art, and the development of art is determined by the development of human culture. And you will be constrained to say the same thing of all the other "factors": economics, civil law, political institutions, morals, etc. What follows? Why, this: the development of human culture is determined by the operation of all the foregoing factors, and the development of all the foregoing factors is determined by the development of culture. This is the old logical fallacy for which our forebears had so strong a propensity:—What does the earth rest on? Whales. And the whales? On water. The water? On the earth. And the earth? On whales—and so on in the same astonishing rotation.

You will agree that one must try, after all, to reason a little more seriously when investigating serious problems of social development.

I am deeply convinced that criticism (more exactly, scientific theorizing on esthetics) can now advance only

if it rests on the materialist conception of history. I also think that in its past development, too, criticism acquired a firmer basis, the nearer its exponents approached to the view of history I advocate. In illustration, I shall point to the *evolution of criticism* in France.

There its evolution was closely linked with the development of historical thought generally. As I have already said, the 18th-century enlighteners looked upon history from an idealist standpoint. They saw in the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge the chief and most profound cause of man's historical progress. But if the advance of science and the development of human thought generally really are the chief and paramount cause of historical progress, it is natural to ask: what determines the progress of thought itself? From the 18th-century point of view, *only one answer* was possible: the nature of man, the immanent laws governing the development of his thought. But if man's nature determines the *whole* development of his thought, then it is obvious that it also determines the *development of literature and art*. Hence, man's nature—and it alone—can, and should, furnish the key to the development of literature and art in the civilized world.

Because of the properties of human nature, men pass through various ages: childhood, youth, adulthood, etc. Literature and art, in their development, pass through the same ages.

"Was there ever a people that was not first a poet and then a thinker?" Grimm asks in his *Correspondance littéraire*, wishing to say thereby that the heyday of poetry coincides with the childhood and youth of peoples, and the progress of philosophy with their adulthood. This 18th-century view was inherited by the 19th century. We even meet with it in the celebrated book of Madame de Staël, *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, where at the same time there are quite substantial rudiments of an entirely different view.

"Examining the three different periods in Greek literature," Madame de Stael says, "we observe a natural movement of the human mind. Homer is characteristic of the first period; in the age of Pericles, we remark the rapid progress of drama, eloquence and morals and the beginnings of philosophy; in the time of Alexander, a more profound study of the philosophical sciences became the principal occupation of men distinguished in literature. Of course, a definite degree of development of the human mind is required to attain the highest peaks of poetry; nevertheless this branch of literature is bound to lose some of its brilliance when the progress of civilization and philosophy corrects some of the errors of the imagination."*

This means that if a nation has emerged from its youth, its poetry is bound in one degree or another to pass into decline.

Madame de Stael knew that the modern nations, despite all their intellectual achievement, had not produced a single poetical work that could be ranked above the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. This fact threatened to shake her confidence in the constant and progressive perfection of mankind, and she was therefore unwilling to discard the theory of the various ages she had inherited from the 18th century, with the help of which the difficulty in question could be easily resolved.

For as we see, from the standpoint of this theory the decline of poetry was a symptom of the intellectual adulthood of the civilized nations of the modern world. But when Madame de Stael abandons these similes as she passes to the history of the literature of modern nations, she is able to look at it from an entirely different standpoint. Particularly interesting in this respect are the chapters in her book which discuss French literature. "French gaiety and French taste have become proverbial

* *De la littérature, etc.*, Paris, an VIII, p. 8.

in all the European countries," she observes in one of these chapters. "This taste and this gaiety were commonly attributed to the national character; but what is the character of a nation, if not a result of the institutions and conditions which have influenced its prosperity, its interests and its customs? In these past ten years, even at the calmest moments of the revolution, the most piquant contrasts failed to prompt a single epigram or a single witticism. Many of the men who acquired great ascendancy over the destiny of France possessed neither elegance of expression, nor brilliance of mind; it may even be that their influence was in part due to their moroseness, taciturnity and cold ferocity."* Whom these lines are hinting at, and how far the hint accords with the facts, is not of importance to us here. The only thing we have to note is that, in Madame de Stael's opinion, *national character is a product of historical conditions*. But what is national character, if not human nature as manifested in the spiritual characteristics of the *given nation*?

And if the nature of any nation is a *product* of its historical development, then obviously it could not have been the *prime mover* of this development. From which it follows that *literature*, being a reflection of a nation's spiritual character, is a product of the same historical conditions that begot the national character. Hence, it is not human nature, nor the character of the given nation, but its history and its social system that explain its literature. It is from this standpoint that Madame de Stael considers the literature of France. The chapter she devotes to 17th-century French literature is an extremely interesting attempt to explain its predominating character by the social and political relations prevailing in France at the time, and by the psychology of the French nobility, regarded from the standpoint of its attitude to the monarchical power.

* *De la littérature*, Vol. II, pp. 1-2.

Here we find some very subtle observations on the psychology of the ruling class of that period, and some very penetrating ideas concerning the future of French literature. "With a new political order in France, no matter what form it may take," Madame de Staël says, "we shall see nothing like it (the literature of the 17th century), and this will be a good proof that the so-called French wit and French elegance were only a direct and necessary product of the monarchical institutions and customs which had existed in France for many centuries."* This new opinion, which holds that literature is a product of the social system, gradually became the predominant opinion in European criticism in the 19th century.

In France, it was reiterated by Guizot in his literary essays.** It was expressed by Sainte-Beuve who, it is

* *Ibid.*, p. 15.

** Guizot's literary views throw such vivid light on the development of historical thought in France that they deserve to be mentioned if only in passing. In his *Vies des poètes français du siècle Louis XIV*, Paris, 1813, Guizot says that the history of Greek literature reflects the natural development of the human mind, but that the problem is far more complicated in the case of modern peoples: here "a host of secondary causes" must be taken into account. When, however, he passes to the history of French literature and begins to investigate these "secondary" causes, we find that they are all rooted in the social relations of France, under whose influence the tastes and habits of her various social classes and strata were moulded. In his *Essai sur Shakespeare*, Guizot regards French tragedy as a reflection of class psychology. Generally, in his opinion, the history of drama is closely associated with the development of social relations. But the view that Greek literature was a product of the "natural" development of the human mind had not been discarded by Guizot even at the time the *Essay on Shakespeare* appeared. On the contrary, this view found its pendant [counterpart] in his views on *natural history*. In his *Essais sur l'histoire de France*, published in 1821, Guizot advances the idea that the political system of every country is determined by its "civic life," and civic life—at least in the case of the peoples of the modern world—is related to landownership in the same way as

true, accepted it only with reservations. Lastly, it was fully and brilliantly reflected in the works of Taine.

Taine was firmly of the persuasion that "every change in the situation of people leads to a change in their mentality."

But it is the mentality of any given society that explains its literature and its art, for "the productions of the human spirit, like the productions of living nature, are only explicable in relation to their environment." Hence, in order to understand the history of the art and literature of any country, one must study the changes that have taken place in the situation of its inhabitants. This is an undoubted truth. And one has only to read his *Philosophie de l'art*, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, or *Voyage en Italie* to find many a vivid and talented illustration of this truth. Nevertheless, like Madame de Stael and other of his predecessors, Taine adhered to the idealist view of history, and this prevented him from drawing from the unquestionable truth that he so vividly and so talentedly illustrated, all the benefit that might be drawn from it by an historian of literature and art.

effect is related to cause. This "*at least*" is highly noteworthy. It shows that, in contrast to the civic life of the peoples of the modern world, the civic life of the antique peoples was conceived by Guizot as a product of "*the natural development of the human mind*," and not as a result of the history of landownership, or of economic relations generally. This is a complete analogy with the view that the development of Greek literature was exceptional. If it be added that at the time his *Essais sur l'histoire de France* appeared Guizot was ardently and resolutely advocating in his journalistic writings the thought that France had been "created by class struggle," there cannot be the slightest doubt that the class struggle in modern society became apparent to modern historians before the class struggle in the states of antique times. It is interesting that the ancient historians, such as Thucydides and Polybius, regarded the struggle of classes in the society of their time as something natural and self-understood, just as our communal peasants regard the struggle between the large and small landholders in their village communities.

Since the idealist regards the advance of the human mind as the ultimate cause of historical progress, it follows from what Taine says that the *mentality* of people is determined by *their situation*, and that *their situation* is determined by *their mentality*. This led to a number of contradictions and difficulties, which Taine, like the 18th-century philosophers, resolved by appealing to *human nature*, which with him took the form of *race*. What doors he sought to open with this key may be clearly seen from the following example. We know that the Renaissance began earlier in Italy than anywhere else, and that Italy, generally, was the first country to end the medieval way of life. What caused this *change in the situation* of the Italians?—The properties of the Italian race, Taine replies.* I leave it to you to judge how satisfactory this explanation is, and shall pass to another example. In the Sciarra Palace in Rome, Taine sees a landscape by Poussin, and he observes in this connection that the Italians, because of the specific qualities of their race, have a peculiar notion of landscape; to them, it is nothing but a villa, only a villa of enlarged dimensions, whereas the German race love nature for its own sake.** Yet in another place Taine himself says in reference to Poussin's landscapes: "To really appreciate them, one must be a lover of (classical) tragedy, classical poetry, of ornate etiquette and signoral or monarchical grandeur. Such sentiments are infinitely remote from those of our contemporaries."*** But why are the sentiments of our contemporaries so unlike those of the people who loved

* "Comme en Italie la race est précocée et que la croûte germanique ne l'a recouverte qu'à demi, l'âge moderne s'y développe plus tôt qu'ailleurs," ["As the Italians are a precocious race, and as the Germanic crust only half covered it, the modern age developed there earlier than in other countries."] *Voyage en Italie*, Paris, 1872, Vol. I, p. 273.

** Ibid., Vol. I, p. 330.

*** Ibid., Vol. I, p. 331.

ornate etiquette, classical tragedy and Alexandrine verse? Is it because the Frenchmen of the time of Le Roi Soleil, say, were people of a *different race* than the Frenchmen of the 19th century? A strange question! Did not Taine himself emphatically and insistently reiterate that the mentality of people changes when their situation changes? We have not forgotten this, and repeat after him: the situation of the people of our time is extremely unlike that of the people of the 17th century, and therefore their sentiments are very different from those of the contemporaries of Boileau and Racine. It remains to learn why the situation has changed, that is, why the ancien régime has given place to the present bourgeois order, and why the Bourse now rules in the country where Louis XIV could say almost without exaggeration: "L'état c'est moi"? And this question is answered quite satisfactorily by the economic history of the country.

You are aware, sir, that Taine's opinions were contested by writers of very different views. I do not know what you think of their contentions, but I would say that none of Taine's critics succeeded in shaking the thesis which is the sum and substance of nearly everything that is true in his theory of esthetics, namely, that art is the product of man's mentality, and that man's mentality changes with his situation. And similarly, none of them detected the fundamental contradiction which rendered any fruitful development of Taine's views impossible; none of them observed that, according to his view of history, man's mentality is determined by his situation, yet is itself the ultimate cause of that situation. Why did none of them observe this? Because their own views of history were permeated by this same contradiction. But what is this contradiction? Of what elements is it composed? It is composed of two elements, one of which is called the *idealist* and the other the *materialist* view of history. When Taine said that people's mentality changes with a change in their situation, he was a materialist; but when

this self-same Taine said that the situation of people is determined by their mentality, he was repeating the idealist view of the 18th century. It need scarcely be added that it was not this latter view that suggested the best of his opinions on literature and art.

What conclusion is to be drawn from this? It is that the contradiction which ruled out any fruitful development of the intelligent and profound views of the French art critics could have been avoided only by a man who said: The art of any people is determined by its mentality; its mentality is a product of its situation, and its situation is determined in the final analysis by the state of its productive forces and its relations of production. But a man who had said this would have been enunciating the materialist view of history.

But I see that it is high time to close. Well, until the next letter! Forgive me if I have chanced to annoy you by the "narrowness" of my views. Next time I shall deal with the art of primitive peoples, and I hope to show that my views are not at all as narrow as you thought, and probably still think.



SECOND LETTER

. The Art of Primitive Peoples



Dear Sir,
There is always, in my opinion, a close causal connection between the art of a people and its economy. I must, therefore, when proceeding to examine the art of primitive peoples, first indicate the principal distinguishing features of a primitive economy.

Generally speaking, it is very natural for the "*economic*" materialist, as one writer⁵ figuratively put it, to "start his tune on the *economic string*." And in this instance, moreover, there are specific and very important reasons why this "string" should be taken as the starting-point of my research.

Until very recently the firm conviction prevailed among sociologists and economists acquainted with ethnology that the economy of primitive societies was a *communist* economy par excellence. "Nowadays," M. M. Kovalevsky wrote in 1879, "the historian-ethnographer knows that the objects of his research are not separate individuals who supposedly enter into agreement with one another to live in common under authorities established by themselves, and not separate families that existed from time imme-

morial and gradually grew into gentile associations, but herd-like groups of individuals of both sexes, groups within which proceeds a slow and spontaneous process of differentiation, the result of which is the rise of private families and individual—at first only moveable—property.”*

Originally even food, that “most important and essential form of moveable property,” was the common possession of the members of the herd-like group, division of the spoils among the various families arising only in tribes that have reached a relatively higher level of development.**

This view of the primitive economic system was also shared by the late N. I. Sieber, whose well-known book, *Essays on Primitive Economic Culture*, was devoted to a critical examination “of the hypothesis . . . that the communal system, in its various phases, was the universal form of economic activity in the early stages of development.” On the basis of extensive factual data, whose analysis, it is true, cannot be said to have been strictly systematic, Sieber arrived at the conclusion that “simple labour co-operation in fishing, hunting, attack and defence, tending of cattle, clearing of forest for cultivation, irrigation, tillage, house-building and the making of big implements like nets, boats, etc., has as its natural corollary the joint consumption of everything produced and, hence, common ownership of immoveable and even moveable property, in so far as it can be protected from the encroachment of neighbouring groups.”***

I could cite many other and no less authoritative investigators. But you are of course familiar with them yourself. I shall not therefore multiply quotations, but will simply say that there is a tendency nowadays to contest

* *Communal Landownership, Its Origin, Development and Decay*, pp. 26-27.

** *Ibid.*, p. 29.

*** *Essays*, pp 5-6, first ed., Moscow, 1883.

the theory of "*primitive communism*." Karl Bücher, for instance, whom I quoted in my first letter, considers that it does not accord with the facts. In his opinion, the peoples who really can be called primitive are very far removed *from communism*. It would be truer to call their economy *individualistic*; but even this term is incorrect, since their mode of life lacks the most essential features of an "economy."

"By an economy," he says in his essay on *The Primitive Economic System*, "we always mean the joint activity of people aimed at the acquisition of useful things. An economy implies concern not only for the given moment, but also for the future, thrifty use of time and its purposeful distribution; it implies labour, the evaluation of things and the regulation of their consumption, the transmission of cultural acquisitions from generation to generation."* But only the feeblest rudiments of these features are to be found in the life of the lower tribes. "Eliminate the use of fire and the bow and arrow from the life of the Bushmen or the Veddahs, and it reduces itself entirely to an individual search for food. Each Bushman must feed himself quite independently. He and his fellows wander naked and unarmed, like wild game, in the close confines of a definite area. . . . All, both men and women, consume in the raw state what each manages to catch with his hands or tear out of the ground with his finger-nails—lower animals, roots, fruits. Sometimes they gather in small groups or large herds, then again disperse, depending on how rich the given locality is in plant food or game, but such groups never become permanent societies. They do not ease the existence of the individual. This picture may not be very pleasing to the modern cultivated person, but the empirical data simply compels us to paint it in this way. Not a stroke in it is imaginary;

* See *Four Essays on National Economy*. Articles from *The Origin of the National Economy*, St. Petersburg, 1898, p. 91.

we have merely eliminated from the life of the lower hunting peoples that which, by general consent, is already an earmark of culture: the use of weapons and fire.”*

It must be admitted that this picture totally differs from the idea of the primitive communist economy which formed in our minds under the influence of the writings of M. M. Kovalevsky and N. I. Sieber.

I do not know which of the two pictures “pleases” you, sir. But that is of little interest. The important thing is not what *pleases* you or me or anyone else, but whether the picture drawn by Bücher is *true*, whether it corresponds to the facts, accords with the empirical data gathered by science. These questions are not only important for the history of economic development; they are of immense moment to all who investigate one or another aspect of primitive culture. It is not without reason, indeed, that art is called a reflection of life. If the “savage” really is such an individualist as Bücher says he is, then the features of his inherent individualism must inevitably be reproduced in his art. Moreover, art is principally a reflection of *social* life; and if you look at the savage with the eyes of Bücher, you would be quite consistent if you should tell me that there can be no art where an “*individual search for food*” prevails, and where people practically engage in no common activity.

And to all this must be added the following: Bücher undoubtedly belongs to the category of *thinking* scientists, whose number unfortunately is not as large as might be wished, and therefore his views are deserving of serious attention even if they happen to be mistaken.

Let us examine his picture of savage life more closely.

Bücher painted this picture on the basis of data relating to the mode of life of the so-called lower hunting tribes, and eliminated from this data only the earmarks of culture: the use of weapons and fire. Thus he himself

* *Four Essays, etc.*, pp. 91-92.

indicates the path we must follow in analyzing his picture. Namely, we must first verify the empirical data he calls into service, in other words, we must examine how the lower hunting tribes actually *live* today, and then select the most probable assumption as to how they *lived* in those remote times when they were still unfamiliar with the use of fire and weapons. First the facts, then the hypothesis.

Bücher cites the Bushmen and the Veddahs of Ceylon. Can it be said that the mode of life of these tribes, who undoubtedly do belong to the lowest hunting tribes, bears none of the earmarks of an economy, and that the individual is left entirely to his own resources? I affirm that it cannot.

Take, first, the Bushmen. It is known that they often gather in parties of 200-300 for a joint hunting expedition. Being undoubtedly an association of people for productive purposes, such a hunting expedition "presumes" both labour and purposeful distribution of time, seeing that on such occasions the Bushmen have to build fences, sometimes stretching several miles, dig deep pits and plant sharp stakes at the bottom of them, and the like.* Needless to say, all this is done not only to satisfy the requirements of the moment, but also for the sake of the future.

"It has been denied that they have any economic sense," Theophil Hahn says, "and when they are referred to in books, one author copies the mistakes of another. Certainly the Bushmen have no notion of political economy, but this does not prevent them from taking thought for a rainy day."**

And truly, part of the meat of the animals they slay is set aside as a store, which they hide in caves or in well-concealed gorges under the charge of old men who

* Cf. "Die Buschmänner, Ein Beitrag zur südafrikanischen Völkerkunde," by Theophil Hahn, In *Globus*, 1870, No. 7, p. 105.

** Ibid., No. 8, p. 120.

are no longer capable of taking a direct part in the chase.* They also lay up stocks of certain bulbous plants. These bulbs, which are gathered in huge quantities, are stored by the Bushmen in birds' nests.** It is also known that they keep stores of *locusts*, for the catching of which they likewise dig deep, long pits.***

This shows how very much mistaken Bücher is when he asserts, after Lippert, that the lower hunting tribes never think of laying up stocks.****

After the collective hunt, it is true, the big Bushmen hunting parties break up into small groups. But, first, it is one thing to be a member of a small group, and quite another to be left to one's own resources. Secondly, even when they disperse in different directions, the Bushmen continue to communicate with one another. Bechuans told Lichtenstein that the Bushmen constantly signalled to each other with the help of bonfires, thanks to which they were better informed of what was going on over a very large area than any of the neighbouring tribes, which were of a much higher cultural level.†) I think that such customs could not have arisen among the Bushmen if the individual had been left to his *own resources*, and if an "*individual search for food*" prevailed among them.

Now as to the Veddahs. These hunters (I am referring to the total savages, those the English call Rock Veddahs) live, like the Bushmen, in small clans, within each of which the "search for food" is conducted by the joint effort of all. True, the German researchers Paul and Fritz Sarrasin, authors of the latest and in some respects the

* Ibid., pp. 120 and 130.

** Ibid., No. 8, p. 130.

*** G. Lichtenstein, *Reise im südlichen Afrika in den Jahren 1803, 1804, 1805 und 1806*, Part II, p. 74.

**** *Four Essays*, p. 75, footnote.

†) Loc. cit., Vol. II, p. 472. It is known that the Terra Fuegians also communicate with one another with the help of bonfires. See Darwin, *Journal of Researches, etc.*, London, 1839, p. 238.

fullest work on the Veddahs,* represent them as pretty confirmed individualists. They say that formerly, when the primitive social relations of the Veddahs had not yet been disrupted by the influence of neighbouring peoples standing at a higher level of cultural development, their hunting territory was divided up among the various families.

This is an entirely mistaken notion. The evidence on which the Sarrasins base their hypothesis concerning the primitive social system of the Veddahs actually points to something quite different. The Sarrasins, for instance, cite the testimony of a certain Van-Huns, who was a governor of Ceylon in the 17th century. But from what Van-Huns says it is only evident that the territory inhabited by the Veddahs was divided into separate sectors, but not that these sectors belonged to *separate families*. Another 17th-century writer, Knox, says that in the forests the Veddahs had "boundaries dividing them from one another," and that "the parties must not overstep these boundaries when hunting or gathering fruits."

Here the reference is to "*parties*," and not to *separate families*, and it is to be presumed therefore that what Knox had in mind was the boundaries of sectors belonging to fairly large gentile associations, not separate families. Further on, the Sarrasins quote the Englishman Tennent. But what does Tennent say? He says that the territory of the Veddahs was divided *among* "clans of families associated by relationship."**

A clan and a separate family are different things. Of course, the Veddah clans were numerically small. Tennent calls them explicitly: "small clans." And this is understandable. Clans *cannot* be large at that low level of development of productive forces which distinguishes the

* Sarrasin, *Die Veddahs von Ceylon und die umgebenden Völkerschaften*, Wiesbaden, 1892-93.

** *Ceylon, An Account of the Island, etc.*, London, 1880, Vol. II, p. 440.

Veddahs. But that is not the point. What is important for us to know in this case is not the size of the Veddah clan, but the role it plays in the life of the separate individuals of the tribe. Can it be said that this role is nil, that the clan does not ease the existence of the separate individuals? By no means! It is known that the Veddah clans wander about under the direction of their headmen. It is also known that at night the children and adolescents lie down to sleep around the chief, and that the adult members of the clan dispose themselves around them in a living chain, ready to protect them from enemy attack.* This custom, undoubtedly, very much eases the existence of the individual, as of the tribe as a whole. It is no less eased by other manifestations of solidarity. For example, widows continue to receive their share of everything that falls into the possession of the clan.**

If they had no such thing as social cohesion, and if the "individual search for food" really did prevail among them, the lot of women who had lost the support of their husbands would, of course, have been quite different.

I would add, in conclusion, that the Veddahs, like the Bushmen, *lay up stocks of meat and other products of the chase* both for their own needs and for purposes of barter with neighbouring tribes.*** Captain Ribeiro even claimed that the Veddahs did not eat fresh meat at all, but cut it into strips and preserved it in hollow trees, drawing upon their store only at the end of the year.**** This is probably an exaggeration, but at any rate I would ask you to note once again, sir, that the example of the Veddahs, as of the Bushmen, definitely refutes Bücher's

* Tennent, loc. cit., Vol. II, p. 441.

** Ibid., Vol. II, p. 445. It is known that the Veddahs are monogamous.

*** Ibid., Vol. II, p. 440.

**** *Histoire de l'isle de Ceylon, écrite par le capitaine J. Ribeiro et présentée au roi de Portugal en 1685*, trad. par m-r l'abbé Le-grand, Amsterdam, MDCCXIX; p. 179.

opinion that savages do not store provisions. And, according to Bücher, storing provisions is one of the most unquestionable earmarks of an economy.

The inhabitants of the Andaman Islands, the Mincopi,* are a little higher in the cultural scale than the Veddahs, but they too live in clans and often engage in collective hunting expeditions. Everything killed by the young unmarried men is *common property* and is divided as the head of the clan directs. Men who took no part in the hunt receive their share nevertheless, since it is assumed that they would have gone with the expedition if they had not been busy on other work in the interest of the community. On returning to the camp the hunters seat themselves around the fire and give themselves over to feasting, dancing and singing. The feast is shared by the unlucky ones who rarely kill anything, and even by the sluggards who prefer to spend their time in idleness.** Does this resemble an "individual search for food," and can it be said in view of this that the Mincopi clans do not ease the life of the individual? No. On the contrary, it must be said that the empirical data relating to the life of the Mincopi in no way resemble the "picture" painted by Bücher.

For his characterization of the mode of existence of primitive hunting tribes, Bücher borrows Schadenberg's description of the life of the Negritos of the Philippine Islands. But anyone who reads Schadenberg's article*** attentively will see that the Negritos, too, conduct their struggle for existence *not as isolated individuals, but by*

* A note once appeared in the London magazine *Nature* saying that the name Mincopi, which is sometimes applied to the inhabitants of the Andaman Islands, has no justification and is not employed either by the natives themselves or by their neighbours.

** C. H. Man, "On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. XII, p. 363.

*** "Ueber die Negritos der Philippinen," in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vol. XII.

the joint efforts of the clan. Schadenberg quotes a Spanish priest who says that with the Negritos "father, mother and children all have their own arrows and go hunting together." One might think from this that they live, if not as isolated individuals, at least in small families. But this is not so. The Negrito "family" is a clan, embracing from 20 to 80 persons.* The members of the clan wander about in a body, under the direction of a headman who selects the camp sites, appoints the time of the expeditions, and so on. In the daytime the old folk, the infirm and the children sit around a large fire while the healthy adult members of the clan are hunting in the woods. At night they all sleep pêle-mêle around the fire.**

Not infrequently, however, children and—this should be particularly noted—the women, too, take part in the hunting expedition. In such cases they all go together, like "a troop of orang-outangs on a plundering expedition."*** Here, too, I see no evidence of an "individual search for food."

On the same level of development stand the pigmies of Central Africa, who have become the subject of more or less authentic observation only very recently. All the "empirical data" gathered by the latest investigators concerning these tribes definitively refute the theory of the "individual search for food." They hunt wild animals collectively, and collectively plunder the fields of neighbouring tillers. "While the men form a vanguard and, if necessary, give battle to the owners of the ravaged fields, the women seize the booty, tie it into bundles or sheaves and carry it off."**** What we have here is not *individualism* but *co-operation*, and even *division of labour*.

* From 20 to 30, according to Schadenberg; de la Girnière says from 60 to 80 (see George Windsor Earle, *The Native Races of the Indian Archipelago*, London, 1853, p. 133)

** Earle, op. cit., p. 131.

*** Earle, *ibid.*, p. 134.

**** Gaetano Casati, *Dix années en Equatoria*, Paris, 1892, p. 116.

I shall not discuss the Brazilian Botocudos, nor the Australian aborigines, because if I did, I should have to repeat what has already been said of many other lower hunting tribes.* It would be more useful to cast a glance at the primitive peoples whose productive forces have already attained a higher level of development. There are many such peoples in America.

The Red Indians of North America live in *gentes*, and expulsion from the gens is a terrible punishment, imposed only for the gravest crimes.** This alone shows how far removed they are from individualism, which Bücher claims to be the distinguishing feature of primitive tribes. With them the gens is the landowner, the lawgiver, the avenger of violations of the rights of the individual, and in many cases his heir and successor. The strength and the viability of the gens depends entirely on the number of its members and, consequently, the death of any member is a severe loss to all the rest. The gens endeavours to make good such losses by adopting new members. *Adoption* is very widespread among the Red Indians of North America.*** It shows how greatly important is the

* Concerning the Australians, I shall make only one observation: whereas Bücher considers that their social relations hardly deserve to be called a social alliance, unbiased investigators are of an entirely different opinion, e.g.: "An Australian tribe is an organized society, governed by strict customary laws, which are administered by the headmen or rulers of the various sections of the community, who exercise their authority after consultation among themselves," etc. "The Kamilaroi Class System of the Australian Aborigines," by R. H. Mathews, in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia*, Vol. X, Brisbane, 1895.

** For expulsion from the gens, see Powell, "Wyandot Government," in the *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Smithsonian Institution*, pp. 67-68.

*** Cf. Lafitau, *Les mœurs des sauvages américains*, Vol. II, p. 163. Also Powell, loc. cit., p. 68. For adoption among the Eskimos, see Franz Boas, "The Central Eskimo," in *Sixth Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, p. 580.

combined effort of the group in their struggle for existence, yet Bücher, led astray by his biased view, sees in it only a proof that the sense of kinship is poorly developed among primitive peoples.*

How very important combined effort is in their struggle for existence, is also shown by their widespread custom of hunting and fishing collectively.** But, apparently, collective fishing and hunting is even more widespread among the South American Indians. I shall cite, in illustration, the Brazilian *Bororo*, whose existence, according to von den Steinen, could only be maintained by the constant foregathering of the male members of the tribe, who often engaged in collective hunting expeditions of quite considerable duration.*** And one would be very much mistaken who asserted that collective hunting assumed extreme importance in the life of the American

* M. M. Kovalevsky, pointing to the fact that the institution of adoption is poorly developed among the Svanetians, says that this is due to the tenacity of their gentile system. (*Laws and Customs in the Caucasus*, Vol. II, pp. 4-5.) But the unquestionable tenacity of the gentile association does not prevent the strong development of adoption among the North American Indians and the Eskimos. (For the Eskimos, see John Murdoch, "Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition," in *Ninth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, p. 417.) Consequently, if the Svanetians rarely practise adoption, the explanation must be sought not in the tenacity of the gens, but in some other quarter.

** Cf. the description of collective buffalo hunting given by G. Catlin in *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians*, London, 1842, Vol. II, p. 199 et seq.

*** *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens*, Berlin, 1894, p. 481: "Der Lebensunterhalt konnte nur erhalten werden durch die geschlossene Gemeinsamkeit der Mehrheit der Männer, die vielfach lange Zeit miteinander auf Jagd abwesend sein musste, was für den Einzelnen undurchführbar gewesen wäre." ["Existence could only be maintained through the close community of the majority of the men, who often had to be away on common hunting expeditions for long periods, which would have been impossible for the separate individual."]

Indians only when they had already quit the lower rung of the hunting mode of life. It must be admitted, of course, that one of the greatest cultural acquisitions of the indigenous tribes of the New World was *agriculture*, which many of them pursued with more or less assiduity and constancy. But agriculture could only *diminish* the importance in their life of hunting generally, and, consequently, of hunting by the combined effort of many members of the tribe in particular. Collective hunting must therefore be regarded as a natural and very characteristic product precisely of the hunting stage of development.

But agriculture did not diminish the significance of co-operation in the life of the primitive American tribes. Far from it. If, with the rise of agriculture, collective hunting did in some degree lose its importance, cultivation of the soil created a new and very broad sphere for the application of co-operation. With the American Indians the fields are (or, at least, were) cultivated by the *combined effort* of the women, to whose share agricultural work falls. This was already mentioned by Lafitau.* Contemporary American ethnologists leave not the slightest doubt on this point: I may cite the work of Powell quoted above, *Wyandot Government*. He says: "Cultivation is communal; that is, all of the able-bodied women of the gens take part in the cultivation of each household tract."** I could give many examples indicative of the importance of communal labour in the life of primitive peoples in other parts of the world, but lack of space compels me to confine myself to a reference to collective fishing among the *New Zealanders*.

* *Les mœurs des sauvages*... II, 77. Cf. Heckewelder. *Histoire des Indiens*, etc., p. 238.

** It is almost superfluous to add that the tracts are not the property of the separate households, but are only assigned to them for use by the gentile council which, I should mention in passing, consists of *women*. Powell, *ibid.*, p. 65.

The nets, *several thousand feet in length*, were made by the combined effort of the whole New Zealand clan and were used in the interest of all its members. "This system of universal help," Polack says, "appears to have been the original plan of the earliest society, from the Creation to the present period, inclusive."* What has been said should be enough, I think, for a critical assessment of the picture of savage life given by Bücher. The facts show fairly convincingly that what prevails among the savages is not an individual search for food, as Bücher claims, but a struggle for existence waged by the combined effort of the whole—more or less numerous—clan, as affirmed by writers who adhered to the view of Sieber and Kovalevsky. This conclusion will be of the greatest value to us in our inquiry on art. It should be firmly borne in mind.

Let us proceed. The manner in which people live naturally and inevitably determines their whole cast of character. If an "individual search for food" prevailed among the savages, they would necessarily have become complete individualists and egotists, an embodiment, as it were, of Max Stirner's ideal. That is how Bücher regards them. He says: "The preservation of life, the instinct which governs the animals, is also the predominant instinctive urge of the savage. The action of this instinct is confined, spacially, to the separate individuals, temporally, to the moment when the need is felt. In other words, the savage thinks *only of himself*, and *only of the present*."**

Here, too, I shall not ask whether this picture pleases you. I only ask: is it not contradicted by the facts? In my opinion, it is, and completely.

In the first place, we already know that even the lowest hunting tribes lay up stocks of provisions. This shows that concern for the future is not entirely unknown to

* *Manners and Customs of the New Zealanders*, Vol. II, p. 107.

** *Four Essays*, p. 79.

them. And even if they did not lay up stocks, it would not necessarily imply that they think only of the present. Why does the savage preserve his weapons even after a successful hunt? Because he thinks of future hunts and of future clashes with enemies. And those bags which the women of savage tribes carry on their backs in the constant journeying from place to place? The most superficial acquaintance with the contents of these bags is enough to inspire a fairly high opinion of the economic forethought of the savage. All manner of things are to be found in them—flat stones for macerating edible roots, pieces of quartz for cutting purposes, flint spearheads, spare stone adzes, thongs made of kangaroo sinew, opossum wool, clay of different colours, pieces of bark, lumps of fat, and the fruits and roots gathered on the way.* A regular treasure-store! If the savage has no thought for the morrow, why does he make his wife carry all these things with her? To the European mind, of course, the household gear of an Australian woman is pretty wretched. But everything is relative in history generally, and in economic history in particular.

However, it is the psychological side of the matter that interests me here.

Since an individual search for food is very far from being prevalent in primitive society, it is not surprising that the savage is by no means the individualist and egoist Bücher makes him out to be. This is distinctly to be seen from the unequivocal evidence of the most trustworthy observers. Here are several vivid examples.

"As far as food is concerned, the strictest communism prevails among them," Ehrenreich says of the Botocudos. "The spoils of the chase are divided among all the members of the horde, as are also any presents they are given, even if it means that each member receives a most in-

* Cf. Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, Vol. I, pp. 320-21.

significant portion.”* The same is true of the Eskimos, with whom, according to Klutschak, food and other moveable property is, so to speak, common property. “So long as a single piece of meat remains in the camp, it belongs to all, and all are taken into account when it is divided, especially the sick and childless widows.”** Klutschak’s testimony fully accords with the earlier evidence of another authority on the Eskimos, Cranz, who also says that the mode of life of the Eskimos is closely akin to communism. A hunter who returns home with a good bag invariably shares it with others, above all with poor widows.*** Every Eskimo as a rule is well acquainted with his genealogy, and this is a very good thing for the needy, “because nobody is ashamed of his poor relations, and it is enough to prove one’s kinship, however remote, with a rich man, to suffer no want of food.”****

This trait of the Eskimo character is also noted by modern American ethnologists, Boas, for instance.†)

The Australians, who were depicted by earlier investigators as consummate individualists, appear on closer acquaintance in an entirely different light. Letourneau says of them that—within the limits of the clan—*everything belongs to all*.**) This statement, of course, must be taken cum grano salis, because it is unquestionable that certain rudiments of private property already exist among the Australians. But rudiments of private property

* “Ueber die Botocudos der brasilischen Provinzen Espiritu Santo und Minas Geraes,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vol. XIX, p. 31.

** *Als Eskimo unter den Eskimos* von H. Klutschak, Wien, Pest, Leipzig, 1881, p. 233.

*** Cranz, *Histoire von Groenland*, 1770, Vol. I, p. 222.

**** *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 291.

†) Franz Boas, “The Central Eskimo,” *Sixth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, pp. 564 and 582.

**) *L’évolution de la propriété*, Paris, 1899, pp. 36 and 49.

are still a long way from the individualism of which Bücher speaks.

And Letourneau himself, on the authority of Fison and Howitt, gives a detailed account of the rules observed by certain Australian tribes in dividing the spoils of the chase.*

These rules are intimately associated with the system of kinship, and their very existence is convincing proof that the game secured by the individual members of an Australian clan is not their private property. And it certainly would be their private property if the Australians were individualists, exclusively engaged in an "individual search for food."

The social instincts of the lower hunting tribes sometimes lead to consequences that would surprise the European. If, for example, a Bushman manages to steal one or more head of cattle from a farmer or herdsman, all the other Bushmen consider themselves entitled to share in the feast which usually follows an exploit of this nature.**

The primitive communistic instincts continue to persist even at higher levels of cultural development. Contemporary American ethnologists depict the Red Indians as veritable communists. Powell, the director of the North American Bureau of Ethnology whom I have already quoted, declares categorically that with the Red Indians *all property* was possessed in common by the "gens or clan," and that *food*, the most important of all, was "by no means" left to be exclusively enjoyed by the individual or family obtaining it. Different tribes had different rules of distributing the meat of animals killed in the chase, but they all amounted in practice to the principle of equal division.

"The hungry Indian had but to ask to receive and this

* Ibid., pp. 41-46.

** Lichtenstein, *Reisen*, Vol. II, p. 338.

no matter how small the supply (of the giver), or how dark the future prospect.”* And note, sir, that this right to receive was not confined to the limits of the gens or tribe. “What was originally a right conferred by kinship connections, ultimately assumed wider proportions, and finally passed into the exercise of an almost indiscriminate hospitality.”** We learn from Dorsey that when the Omaha Indians had plenty of corn and the Parkas and Pawnees had very little, the former shared their stores with the latter, and vice versa.*** This meritorious custom had already been noted by old Lafitau, who rightly observed that “Europeans do not act this way.”****

As to the Indians of South America, it will be sufficient to cite Martius and von den Steinen. The former says of the Brazilian Indians that objects obtained by the joint effort of many members of the community were the common property of these members, while according to the latter the Brazilian *Bakairi*—of whom he made a close study—lived as one family and shared whatever was obtained by hunting or fishing.*) The Bororo hunter who kills a jaguar invites other hunters to join him in consuming the flesh of the beast, but donates its *skin and teeth to the man or woman who is the nearest relative of the last person to have died in the community.***)

A hunter of the Kaffir tribes of South Africa cannot

* “Indian Linguistic Families,” *Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, p. 34. I shall add that among the American Indians, according to Matilda Stevenson, the strong enjoyed no privileges in the division of the spoils compared with the weak (“The Sia,” by Matilda Coxe Stevenson, *Eleventh Annual Report*, p. 12).

** Powell, op. cit., p. 34.

*** “Omaha Sociology” by Owen Dorsey, *Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, p. 274.

**** Lafitau, *Les mœurs des sauvages*, Vol. II, p. 91.

*) Von den Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens*, pp. 67-68. Martius, *Von dem Rechtzustande unter den Ureinwohnern Brasiliens*, p. 35.

**) Von den Steinen, *ibid.*, p. 491.

dispose of his spoils at his own discretion, but must share them with his friends.* When a man slaughters an ox, all his neighbours come as his guests and remain until the last of the meat has been consumed. Even the "king" bows to this custom and tolerantly entertains his subjects.** To borrow the words of Lafitau, Europeans do not act this way!

We already know from Ehrenreich that when a Boto-cudo receives a present he shares it among all the members of his clan. Darwin says the same of the Tierra Fuegians,*** and Lichtenstein of the primitive peoples of South Africa. According to the latter a man that does not share a gift with others is subjected to the most offensive ridicule.**** When the Sarrasins gave a Veddah a silver coin, he would take his hatchet and make as if to hack it to pieces and then, with an expressive gesture, ask for some more coins so that he might donate them to his friends.**) Muligawang, king of the Bechuans, requested one of Lichtenstein's companions to give him a present *secretly*, for otherwise his dark-skinned majesty would be obliged to share it with its subjects.***) Nordenskjöld relates that when he was visiting the Chukchis one of the juvenile members of the tribe was presented with a piece of sugar, and the dainty immediately began to pass from mouth to mouth.****)

Enough. Bücher makes a great mistake when he says that the savage thinks only of himself. The empirical data at the disposal of the modern ethnologist do not leave the slightest doubt on this score. We may therefore

* N. Lichtenstein, *Reisen*, Vol. I, p. 444.

** Ibid., p. 450.

*** *Journal of Researches, etc.*, p. 242.

**** *Reisen*, Vol. I, p. 450.

*) *Die Weddahs von Ceylon*, p. 560.

**) Lichtenstein, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 479-80.

***) *Die Umseglung Asiens und Europas auf der "Vega,"* Leipzig, 1882, Vol. II, p. 139.

now pass from facts to hypothesis and ask how we must picture the mutual relations of our savage progenitors at that extremely remote period when they were still unacquainted with the use of fire and weapons. Have we any grounds for believing that this period saw the reign of individualism, and that the life of the separate individual was not in the least eased by social solidarity?

It seems to me that we have not the slightest grounds for such a belief. Everything I know concerning the habits of the monkeys of the Old World leads me to think that our forebears were social animals even at the time when they were still only "*sub-men*." Espinas says: "What distinguishes a herd of monkeys from a herd of other animals is, first, the assistance its individuals render one another, or the *solidarity* of its members; second, the subordination, or *obedience* of all, even the males, to the leader, who looks after the general welfare."* As you see, this is already a social alliance in the full meaning of the term.

True, the big anthropoid apes apparently have no particular disposition for social life. But even they cannot be called complete individualists. Some of them often foregather and sing in chorus while drumming with their hands on hollow trees. Du Chaillu came across troupes of gorillas comprising from eight to ten individuals; gibbons have been seen in herds of one hundred and even one hundred and fifty. If the orang-outangs live in separate small families, we must take into consideration the exceptional conditions of life of these animals. It appears that the anthropoid apes are no longer able to carry on the struggle for existence. They are dying out, their numbers are drastically declining and, as Topinard rightly observes, their present mode of life cannot give us the slightest notion of how they formerly lived.**

* *Les sociétés animales*, sec. ed., Paris, 1878, p. 502.

** *L'Anthropologie et la science sociale*, Paris, 1900, pp. 122-23.

Darwin, at any rate, was convinced that our anthropomorphic progenitors lived in societies,* and I am not aware of a single reason to consider this conviction erroneous. And if our anthropomorphic progenitors lived in societies, then it is proper to ask *when*, at which moment in their subsequent zoological development—and *why*—should their social instincts have given way to the individualism that is supposedly characteristic of primitive man? I do not know. Nor does Bücher. At least, he tells us nothing whatever on this point.

His contention, as we see, is as little supported by *hypothetical* considerations as by the factual data.

* *The Descent of Man*, 1883. p. 502.



THIRD LETTER



How did an economy evolve out of the individual search for food? This, in Bücher's opinion, it is now almost impossible to conceive. I think that we can form a conception on this point if we take into consideration that *originally the search for food was not individual, but social*. Men originally "searched" for food as the social animals "search" for it: the combined efforts of more or less large groups were directed toward the acquisition of the *ready-made* gifts of nature. Earle, whom I quoted in my last letter, says on the authority of de la Girnière that when the Negritos go hunting in whole clans they resemble a troop of orang-outangs on a plundering expedition. So do the pigmies of the Akka tribe when, as described above, they join together to ravage the fields of neighbours. If the term "economy" is to be understood as meaning the joint action of people aimed at the acquisition of useful things, then plundering expeditions like the aforesaid must be recognized as one of the earliest forms of economic activity.

The original method of acquiring useful things was

the *gathering of the ready-made gifts of nature*.* This method, of course, may be subdivided into several categories, fishing and hunting being among their number. *Gathering* was succeeded by *production*, the one passing into the other by a series of almost imperceptible transitions—as is to be seen, for instance, in the early history of agriculture. Agriculture, of course, even the most primitive, already bears all the earmarks of economic activity.**

And since, originally, fields were very often cultivated by the joint efforts of the clan, here you have a clear illustration of the way the social instincts inherited by primeval man from his anthropoid progenitors might have found wide application in his economic activity. The subsequent history of these instincts was determined by the—constantly changing—relations in which men stood towards one another in their economic activity, or, as Marx put it, in the process of production of their life. Nothing could be more natural, and *I cannot conceive what can be incomprehensible in this natural course of development*.

But wait.

The difficulty, according to Bücher, is as follows. "It would be fairly natural to presume," he says, "that this

* As Panckow rightly says in *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin*, Vol. XXX, No. 3; p. 162: "Das Sammelvolk und nicht das Jägervolk müsste danach an dem unteren Ende einer wirtschaftlichen Stufenleiter der Menschheit stehen." ("Gathering peoples, not hunting peoples, must accordingly have stood on the lowest rung of the ladder of human development.") This too is the view of the Sarrasins, who maintain that hunting is an important "means of obtaining food only at a comparatively higher stage of development." *Die Weddahs*, p. 401.

** Elements of economic activity may likewise be seen in certain customs of the Australians which once more show that they also take thought for the future. It is forbidden with them to tear up by the roots plants whose fruits they use as food, or to destroy nests of the birds whose eggs they eat, etc. Ratzel, *Anthropo-Geographie*, Vol. I, p. 348.

crucial change (the transition from the individual search for food to an economy) begins at the point when simple appropriation of the gifts of nature for immediate consumption is superseded by production directed toward a more distant end, and the instinctive activity of the organs is superseded by work, the employment of physical energy with a conscious purpose. But we should gain little from such a purely theoretical premise. *Work*, as it is practised by primitive peoples, is a rather vague thing. The nearer we approach the point at which its development begins, the closer does it approximate, both in form and content, *to play*.”*

Hence, the obstacle to an understanding of the transition from the simple search for food to economic activity is that it is not easy to draw a boundary line between work and play.

The relation of work to play—or, if you like, of play to work—is a question of the highest importance in elucidating the *genesis of art*. I would therefore invite you, sir, to listen attentively and *carefully weigh* everything Bücher has to say on this point. Let him speak for himself.

“It is probable that man is prompted to go beyond the mere search for food by instincts similar to those which are to be observed among the higher animals, especially the imitative instinct and the instinctive inclination for experiments of every kind. Domestication of animals, for example, begins not with useful animals, but with such as man keeps solely for his pleasure. Everywhere, apparently, the development of manufacturing industry begins with ornamentation of the body, tattooing, piercing or other means of deforming various parts of the body, after which the making of ornaments, masks, drawings on bark, hieroglyphs and similar occupations develop little by little. . . . Hence, technical skills are acquired in the course

of play, and are put to practical use only gradually. The hitherto accepted succession in the stages of development must therefore be replaced by its very opposite: play is older than work, and art is older than the production of useful things.”*

You hear this? *Play is older than work, and art is older than the production of useful things.*

Now you will understand why I asked you to pay careful attention to Bücher's words: they have a very close bearing on the theory of history I am defending. If play really were older than work, and art really older than the production of useful things, then the materialist explanation of history—at least in the form the author of *Capital* imparts to it—*would not stand up to the criticism of facts*, and my whole argument would have to be turned upside down: I would have to argue from the dependence of economic activity on art, not from the dependence of art on economic activity. But is Bücher right?

Let us first verify what he says about play. We shall speak of art later.

According to Spencer, the principal distinguishing feature of play is that it does not directly aid the processes essential for the maintenance of life. The activity of the player pursues no utilitarian purpose. True, the exercise of the organs which are brought into motion in play is useful both for the playing individual and, in the long run, for the whole race. But exercise is not precluded in activities which pursue utilitarian purposes. The important thing is not the exercise, but the fact that utilitarian activity, apart from the exercise and the pleasure it affords, leads to the attainment of some practical object—the securing of food, for example—whereas play has no such object. When a cat chases a mouse, in addition to the pleasure it derives from exercising its organs, it secures a dainty morsel of food; but when the

same cat chases a ball of thread on the floor, it gets nothing from the game but pleasure. But if this is so, how could such a purposeless activity have arisen?

We know how Spencer answers this question. With the lower animals, all the energy of the organism is expended in fulfilling functions essential to the maintenance of life. The activity of the lower animals is solely utilitarian. But this is not so at the higher rungs of the zoological ladder. Here the energy is not entirely absorbed by utilitarian activity. Thanks to better nourishment, a certain amount of surplus energy accumulates in the organism and demands an outlet, and when an animal plays it is obeying this demand. Play is an artificial exercise of energy.*

Such is the *origin* of play. And what is its *content*? In other words: if, when playing, an animal exercises its energy, why does one animal exercise it in one way, and another in a different way; why does the manner of play vary with the different species of animals?

Spencer says that in the case of beasts of prey it is quite evident that their play consists in sham hunting and sham fighting. It is all "a dramatizing of the prey—an ideal satisfaction for the destructive instincts in the absence of real satisfaction for them"**. What does this mean? It means that the content of the play of animals is determined by the activity by which they maintain their existence. Which, then, is anterior to the other: play to utilitarian activity, or utilitarian activity to play? It is obvious that utilitarian activity is *anterior to play, that the former is "older" than the latter*. And what do we find in the case of human beings? The "games" of children—nursing dolls, giving tea-parties and so on—are dramatizings of adult activities.*** But what purposes

* Cf. *The Principles of Psychology*, St. Petersburg, 1876, Vol. IV, pp. 330 et seq.

** Ibid., p. 335.

*** Ibid., p. 335.

do the activities of the adults pursue? In the vast majority of cases they pursue *utilitarian purposes*. Hence, in the case of *human beings* too, *activity pursuing utilitarian purposes*, in other words, activity essential to the maintenance of the life of the individual and of society, *is anterior to play and determines its content*. Such is the conclusion that logically follows from what Spencer says on the subject of play.

This logical conclusion fully coincides with the views of Wilhelm Wundt on the subject.

"Play is the child of work," the famous psycho-physiologist says. "There is no form of play that does not have its prototype in some serious occupation which, it needs no saying, is antecedent to it in time. For it is vital necessity that compels man to work, but little by little he comes to regard the exertion of his energy as a pleasure."*

Play springs from the desire to re-experience the pleasure caused by useful exertion of energy. And the greater the reserve of energy, the more impelling is the urge to play, other conditions of course being equal. Nothing is easier than to show this quite firmly.

Here, as everywhere, I shall demonstrate and explain my thought with the help of examples.

We know that savage dances often reproduce the movements of animals.** What is the explanation? Nothing but the desire to re-experience the pleasure excited by the exertion of energy in the chase. Observe the way an Eskimo pursues a seal: he creeps up to it on his belly; he tries to hold his head the way the seal does; he imitates all its movements, and only when he has stolen very closely upon it does he finally decide to shoot.*** Imitation

* *Ethik*, Stuttgart, 1886, p. 145.

** "So sprachen sie von einem Affentanz, einem Faultiertanz, einem Vogeltanz u.s.w. [They (the savages) spoke, for example, of a monkey dance, a sloth dance, a bird dance, etc.]" Schomburgk, *Reisen in Britischer Guiana*, Leipzig, 1847, Part I, p. 154.

*** Cf. Cranz, *Histoire von Groenland*, Vol. I, p. 207.

of the bodily movements of the animal therefore constitutes a very important part of the chase. Little wonder, then, that when the hunter conceives the desire to re-experience the pleasure caused by the expenditure of energy in hunting, he again begins to imitate the bodily movements of the animals and creates his unique hunting dance. But what determines the character of the dance, that is, of the *play*? It is determined by the character of the serious occupation, namely, *hunting*. Play is the child of work, which is necessarily anterior to it in time.

Another example. When visiting one of the Brazilian tribes, von den Steinen saw a dance which depicted with amazing dramatic effect the death of a wounded warrior.* Which, do you think, was anterior to the other: war to the dance, or the dance to war? I think that war came first, and that the dances depicting warlike scenes arose later; first there was the impression produced on the savage by the death of a comrade wounded in war, then appeared the urge to reproduce this impression through the medium of the dance. If I am right—and I am sure I am—then here, too, I am fully entitled to say that activity pursuing a utilitarian purpose is older than play, and that play is its offspring.

Bücher would perhaps have said that to primitive man both war and hunting are not so much work as amusement, that is, play. But that would be mere playing with words. At the stage of development to which the primitive hunting tribes belong, hunting and war are essential activities for the subsistence and self-defence of the hunter. Both have a very definite utilitarian purpose, and it is only by a grave and almost deliberate misuse of terms that one can identify them with play, whose distinguishing feature is precisely the lack of such a purpose. What is

* *Unter den Naturvölkern Brasiliens*, p. 324.

more, experts in savage life say that savages never hunt for pleasure alone.”*

But let us take a third example, one that leaves no doubt whatever as to the correctness of the view I am defending.

I have already referred to the great importance of social labour in the life of those primitive peoples which, in addition to hunting, engage in agriculture. Now I want to draw your attention to the way fields are socially cultivated by the *Bagobos*, one of the indigenous tribes of Southern Mindanao. With them agricultural work is done by both sexes. On the day the rice is to be sown the men and the women gather together and set to work. The men go on ahead and *dance* as they insert their iron hoes into the soil. The women follow, casting the rice seed into the holes made by the men and covering it with earth. All this is done in a solemn and serious manner.**

Here we find *play* (dancing) combined with *work*. But the combination does not obscure the true connection between the two. If you do not believe that originally the Bagobos inserted their hoes in the soil and planted rice for amusement, and only at a subsequent period began cultivating the soil for their subsistence, you are bound to admit that in this case the work is older than the play, and that the play *is a product* of the specific conditions in which planting is done by the Bagobos. Play is the child of work, which was anterior to it in time.

* “The Indian never hunted game for sport.” Dorsey, “Omaha Sociology,” *Third Annual Report*, p. 267. Cf. Hellwald: “Die Jagd ist aber zugleich an und für sich Arbeit, eine Anspannung physischer Kräfte und dass sie als Arbeit, nicht etwa als Vergnügen von den wirklichen Jagdstämmen aufgefasst wird, darüber sind wir erst kürzlich belehrt worden.” [“Hunting is at the same time work in itself, an exertion of physical energy, and that it is regarded by the real hunting tribes as work, and not as pleasure, we have learned only recently.”] *Kulturgeschichte*, Augsburg, 1876, Vol. I, p. 109.

** “Die Bewohner von Süd-Mindanao und der Insel Samal,” by Al. Schadenberg, *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vol. XVII, p. 19.

Please note that in such cases the dances themselves are a mere reproduction of the bodily movements of the worker. In corroboration, I shall cite Bücher himself. In his *Arbeit und Rhythmus*,* he likewise says that "many of the dances of the primitive peoples are nothing but a conscious imitation of definite production actions. In the case of such mimic depictions, therefore, work must have necessarily preceded the dance."** After this, I simply cannot understand how Bücher can assert that play is older than work.

Generally, it may be said without the slightest exaggeration that the whole content of *Arbeit und Rhythmus* is a complete and brilliant refutation of Bücher's views on the question I am now examining—the relation of play and art to work. It is truly astonishing that Bücher fails to observe this stark and glaring contradiction.

He was evidently misled by the theory of play recently submitted to the scientific world by Professor Karl Groos of Giessen.*** An acquaintance with Groos's theory would therefore not be amiss.

In the opinion of Groos, the view that play is a manifestation of surplus energy is not entirely borne out by the facts. Puppies play with one another until they are exhausted, and resume their play after the briefest rest, which does not impart an excess of energy, but only an amount barely sufficient for the resumption of the game. In the same way our children, although they may be very tired, as for instance after a long walk, immediately forget their fatigue the moment they begin to play. They do not need prolonged rest and the accumulation of excess energy: "instinct impels them to activity not only when, to put it figuratively, the cup is filled to overflowing, but even when it contains but a single drop."**** Surplus of

* P. 79, 1896, Leipzig.

** Ibid.

*** In *Die Spiele der Tiere*, Jena, 1896.

**** *Die Spiele der Tiere*, p. 18.

energy is not a *conditio sine qua non* of play, but only a favouring circumstance.

But even if this were not so, Spencer's theory (Groos calls it the Schiller-Spencer theory) would still be inadequate. It seeks to elucidate the *physiological* significance of play, but does not explain its *biological* significance—which is substantial. Play, especially the play of young animals, has a definite biological purpose. Both with men and animals, the play of the young represents the exercise of qualities which are useful for the separate individuals or for the race as a whole.* Play trains the young animal for its future life activity. But precisely because it *trains* the young animal for its future life activity, it is *anterior* to it, and Groos, consequently, cannot agree that play is the child of work: on the contrary, he maintains that *work is the child of play*.**

This, as you see, is the same view that we met with in Bücher. Consequently, everything I have said about the real relation of work to play also applies to it. But Groos approaches the question from a different angle: what he has in mind is primarily the play of children, not adults. How will the matter present itself if we, like Groos, examine it from this standpoint?

Let us again take an example. Eyre says*** that the children of the Australian aborigines often play at war, and are strongly encouraged to do so by their elders because it develops agility in the future warriors. We find the same thing with the Red Indians of North America, where sometimes many hundreds of children take part in such games under the direction of experienced warriors. Catlin maintains that this form of play is a material branch of the Indians' education.**** Here we have a viv-

* Ibid., pp. 19-20.

** Ibid., p. 125.

*** *Manners and Customs of the Aborigines of Australia*, p. 228.

**** Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians*, Vol. I, p. 131.

id instance of that training of the young individuals for their future life activity of which Groos speaks. But does this instance corroborate his theory? Yes and no. Because of the "system of education" prevailing among the primitive peoples I have named, in the *life of the individual playing* at war precedes actual participation in war.* It follows, then, that Groos is right: regarded from the standpoint of the separate individual, play is really older than utilitarian activity. But why, among the foresaid peoples, has a system of education arisen in which playing at war holds such a big place? Quite understandably, because it is very important for them to have well-trained warriors who are accustomed to military exercises from their childhood. Hence, regarded from the standpoint of society (the race), the matter presents itself in quite a different light: first came real war and the demand it created for good warriors, then followed playing at war in order to satisfy this demand. In other words, regarded from the standpoint of society, utilitarian activity is older than play.

Another example. One of the things an Australian woman depicts in her dance is the way she pulls nutritious roots out of the ground.** This dance is seen by her daughter and, with the child's customary tendency to imitation, she reproduces the bodily movements of her mother.*** And she does so at an age when she does not have to occupy herself seriously with the gathering of food. Consequently, in her life the game (dance) of pulling up

* Letourneau, *L'évolution littéraire dans les diverses races humaines*, Paris, 1894, p. 34.

** "Another favourite amusement among the children is to practise the dances and songs of the adults." Eyre, op. cit., p. 227.

*** "Les jeux des petits sont l'imitation du travail des grands." *Dernier journal du docteur David Livingston*, Vol. II, p. 267.

"The play of the girls consists in imitation of the serious work of their mothers.... The boys play with... small shields, or bows and arrows." (*Expedition to the Zambesi*, David and Charles Liv-

roots precedes the actual pulling of roots: with her, play is older than work. But in the life of the society, of course, actual pulling of roots preceded the reproduction of the process in the dances of the adults and the games of the children. *In the life of society, therefore, work is older than play.** This, I think, is perfectly clear. And if it is clear, it only remains to ask from what standpoint should the economist, or any student of social science generally, consider the question of the relation of work to play. I think that the answer to this is also clear: the student of social science must consider this question—just as any other question arising in this science—exclusively from the standpoint of society. He must, because from this standpoint it is much easier to find the reason for the fact that in the life of the individual play is anterior to work; if we did not go beyond the standpoint of the individual, we should not be able to understand why play is anterior to work in his life, nor why he amuses himself with certain games and not others.

This equally applies to biology, except that here the word “society” must be replaced by the word “race” (more correctly, species). If the purpose of play is to train the young individual for his future task in life, then, obviously, the development of the species first confronts it with a certain task which calls for a definite kind of activity, and only then, and by virtue of this task, come the selection of individuals in accordance with the qualities it requires, and the training of these qualities in childhood. Here, too, play is nothing but the child of work, a function of utilitarian activity.

In this instance the only difference between man and the lower animals is that the development of inherited instincts plays a far smaller part in his upbringing than

ingstone.) “The amusements of the natives are various but they usually have a reference to their future occupations” (Eyre, p. 227).

* “These games are an exact imitation of the latest kind of work.” Klutschak, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

in that of the animal. The tiger cub is born a beast of prey, but man is not born a hunter or tiller, a soldier or merchant; he becomes these only under the influence of the conditions surrounding him. And this is true of both sexes. An Australian girl is not born with an instinctive urge to pull up roots or to perform other work similarly needed for subsistence. This urge is engendered by her tendency to imitation: she endeavours in her games to reproduce the work of her mother. But why does she imitate her mother, and not her father? Because in the society to which she belongs a division of labour has already been established between man and woman. And this reason too, as you see, does not lie in the instincts of the individuals, but in their social environment. But the more important the social environment, the less is it permissible to abandon the standpoint of society and adopt the standpoint of the individual, as Bücher does in his reflections on the relation of play to work.

Groos says that Spencer's theory ignores the *biological* significance of play. It might be said with far greater warrant that Groos himself has failed to observe its *sociological significance*. It is possible, however, that this omission will be corrected in the second part of his work, which is to be devoted to the games of human beings. Division of labour between the sexes furnishes ground for examining Bücher's reflections from another angle. He maintains that with the adult savage work is a pastime. This, of course, is erroneous in itself: with the savage, hunting is not a sport, but a serious occupation essential for the maintenance of life.

Bücher himself quite rightly observes that "savages often experience dire want, and the girdle which comprises all their clothing does indeed perform the service of what the common folk of Germany call 'Schmachtriemen,' with which they compress their stomachs so as to ease the torments of hunger."* Do the savages remain sports-

* *Four Essays*, p. 77.

men on these occasions too—which Bücher himself admits are “frequent”—and hunt for amusement, instead of from dire necessity? Lichtenstein tells us that the Bushmen are sometimes forced to go without food for several days in succession. In these periods of hunger the search for food is, of course, intense. Does it still remain a pastime? The North American Indians dance the “buffalo dance” precisely when they have not come across buffalo for a long time and are threatened with starvation.* The dance is continued until buffalo are sighted, and the Indians see a causal connection between the dance and their appearance. Leaving aside the question, which does not concern us here, as to how the idea of such a connection could have arisen in their minds, we can certainly say that neither the “buffalo dance,” nor the hunt which begins with the appearance of the animals, can be regarded as a pastime. Here the dance itself is an activity pursuing a utilitarian purpose, and is closely associated with the principal life activity of the Red Indian.**

* Catlin, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 127.

** Bücher thinks that primitive man could live without work. “Undoubtedly,” he says, “there were immeasurable periods in which man lived without working, and one might if one wanted find plenty of places on the earth where the sago-palm, the pisang, the breadfruit tree and the coconut and date-palms even now permit him to live with a minimal exertion of effort.” (*Four Essays*, pp. 72-73.) If, by immeasurable periods, Bücher means the era when “man” was only taking shape as a separate zoological species (or race), I would say that at that time our progenitors probably “worked” neither more nor less than the anthropoid apes, of whom we have no right whatever to assert that play holds a bigger place in their life than activity essential for the support of life. And as to the special geographical conditions that supposedly permit man to live with a minimal exertion of effort, here too exaggeration should be eschewed. The luxuriant natural conditions of the torrid countries demand no less effort of man than those of the temperate zone. Ehrenreich even believes that, all in all, such effort is much greater in the torrid than in the temperate

Furthermore, consider the wife of our supposed sportsman. During the march she carries heavy burdens, she digs for roots, she builds the hut, makes the fire, curries skins, weaves baskets, and, at a later period, tills the soil.* Is all this play, not work? According to F. Prescott, among the Dakota Indians the male in summer works not more than one hour a day. This, if you like, may be called a pastime. But the female of the same tribe works in the same season about *six* hours a day—and it is harder to believe that this is “play.” And in the winter both husband and wife have to work far more than in the summer—the husband about six hours a day, and the wife about *ten*.**

This, definitely and positively, cannot be regarded as “play.” This is already work sans phrases, and although it is less intensive and less exhausting labour than that of the working men in civilized society, it is none the less *economic activity of a quite definite kind*.

Consequently, the theory of play offered by Groos does not save the view of Bücher I am examining. Work is just as truly older than play as parents are older than their children and society is older than its individual members.

But having touched upon the subject of play, I want to draw your attention to another idea of Bücher's, one with which you are already partly familiar.

countries. (“Ueber die Botocudos,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vol. XIX, p. 27.)

Naturally, when the cultivation of food plants begins, the rich soil of the torrid countries is capable of considerable lightening man's work, but such cultivation begins only at a relatively high level of civilization.

* “The principal occupation of the women in this village consists in procuring wood and water, in cooking, dressing robes and other skins, in drying meat and wild fruit and raising corn.” Catlin, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 121.

** See Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information, etc.*, Part III, p. 235.

In his opinion, at the earliest stages of human development cultural acquisitions are not handed down from generation to generation,* and this deprives the savage mode of life of a feature that constitutes one of the most essential earmarks of an economy.** But if play, even according to Groos, serves in primitive society as a means of training the young individuals for their future tasks in life, then it is obviously one of the links connecting the various generations and, in fact, serves as a medium for the transmission of cultural acquisitions from one to the other.

Bücher says: "It may be conceded, of course, that the latter (i.e., primitive man) cherishes a particular affection for the stone axe on the making of which he has perhaps toiled for a whole year at the cost of enormous effort, and that the axe seems to him a part of his own being; but it would be a mistake to think that this precious possession will pass down to his children and grandchildren and serve as a basis for future progress." Certain as it is that such objects conduce to the development of the first concepts of "mine" and "thine," yet numerous observations show that these concepts are associated with the particular person and disappear with him. "*Possessions are buried in the grave together with the owner* (Bücher's italics) whose personal property they were as long as he lived. This custom prevails in all parts of the world, and relics of it are to be met with among many peoples even in the cultural period of their development."***

This, of course, is true. But with the disappearance of the thing, does the *ability to make a similar thing also disappear*? No, it does not. Even among the lowest hunting tribes we see that the parents strive to transmit to

* *Four Essays*, pp. 87 et seq.

** Ibid., p. 91.

*** Ibid., p. 88.

their children all the technical knowledge they themselves acquired. "As soon as the son of an aboriginal Australian learns to walk, his father takes him on hunting and fishing expeditions, teaches him and instructs him in the traditional lore."* And the Australians are not an exception in this respect. With the North American Indians it was the practice for the clan to appoint special instructors, whose duty it was to impart to the younger generation all the practical knowledge they might need in the future.** With the Koussa Kaffirs all children over the age of ten are trained together under the unflagging supervision of the head of the tribe, the boys being instructed in war and hunting, and the girls in the various kinds of domestic work.*** Is this not a living link between the generations, the transmission of cultural acquisitions from one to the other?

Although after the death of a man his belongings are very often destroyed at his graveside, the ability to produce these things is transmitted from generation to generation, *and this is far more important than the transmission of the things themselves*. Of course, the destruction of the deceased's possessions at this graveside retards the accumulation of wealth in primitive society: but, in the first place, it does not, as we have seen, prevent a living connection between generation and generation, and, in the

* Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, 2nd ed., Vol. I, p. 339. Schadenberg says the same of the Philippine Negritos—*Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vol. XII, p. 136. On the education of children among the inhabitants of the Andaman Islands, see Maine, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Vol. XII, p. 91. If Emile Deschamps is to be believed, the Veddahs are an exception to the general rule: they supposedly do not instruct their children in the use of weapons (*Carnet d'un voyageur. Au pays des Veddahs*, 1892, pp. 369-70). This testimony is highly improbable. Generally, Deschamps does not give the impression of being a competent investigator.

** Powell, "Indian Linguistic Families," *Seventh Annual Report*, p. 35.

*** Lichtenstein, *Reisen*, Vol. I, p. 425.

second place, very many things being socially owned, the property of the separate individual is usually not very large. It consists primarily of weapons, and the weapons of the primitive hunter-warrior are intimately fused with his person, constitute, as it were, an extension of it, and are therefore little suited for use by others.* For this reason, the fact that they are interred with their deceased owner does not involve so great a loss to society as might appear at a first glance. When, with the subsequent development of technology and social wealth, the interment of the possessions of a dead man becomes a serious loss to his relatives, it is gradually restricted, or discontinued altogether, and is supplanted by merely symbolical destruction.**

Since Bücher denies the existence among savages of a living connection between the generations, it is not surprising that he is very sceptical as to whether they possess parental feeling.

"Modern ethnographers," he says, "have laboured hard to show that maternal love is a feature common to all stages of cultural development. It is indeed hard to concede that a feeling which is so charmingly manifested by many species of animals everywhere, could have been wanting in man. But numerous observations have been recorded which would indicate that the spiritual link between parents and children is the fruit of culture, and that with the lowest peoples the concern of the individual for the preservation of his own ego is stronger than any other spiritual prompting, and, perhaps, is even his only

* Here is one of many examples: "Der Jäger darf sich keiner fremden Waffen bedienen; besonders behaupten diejenigen Wilden, die mit dem Blasrohr schießen, dass dieses Geschoss durch den Gebrauch eines Fremden verderben werde und geben es nicht aus ihren Händen." ["The hunter must not use another's weapon: in particular, the savages who shoot with the blowpipe claim that this weapon is spoiled when used by another person, and do not let it out of their hands."] Martius, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

** See Letourneau, *L'évolution de la propriété*, pp. 418 et seq.

concern. . . . This boundless egotism is manifested in the ruthlessness with which many primitive peoples, during their marches, leave to their fate, or abandon in solitary places, the *sick* and the *aged* who might be a hindrance to the sound and strong.”*

Unfortunately, Bücher gives very few facts in support of his contention, and we are left in almost complete ignorance as to precisely which observations he is referring to. All that remains, therefore, is to check his statements with such observations as I am familiar with myself.

The Australians are with every justification classed among the lowest of the hunting tribes. Their cultural development is negligible. We might therefore expect that the “cultural acquisition” known as parental love is still unknown to them. But this expectation is not borne out by the facts: *the Australians are passionately attached to their children; they are fond of playing with them and petting them.***

The Veddahs of Ceylon likewise stand at the lowest rung of development. Bücher cites them side by side with the Bushmen as an example of extreme savagery. Yet they, too, on the testimony of Tennent, are “*remarkably attached to their children and relatives.*”***

The Eskimos, whose culture dates back to the glacial period, are also “*extremely fond of their children.*”****

That the South American Indians have a great love of their children was already observed by Father Gumilla.*) Waitz considered it one of the most out-

* *Four Essays*, pp. 81-82.

** Eyre, op. cit., p. 241.

*** Tennent, *Ceylon*, Vol. II, p. 445. (Cf. P. and F. Sarrasin, *Die Weddahs von Ceylon*, p. 469.)

**** D. Cranz, *Historie von Groenland*, Vol. I, p. 213. Cf. Klutschak, *Als Eskimo unter den Eskimos*, p. 234, and Boas, op. cit., p. 566.

*) *Histoire naturelle, civile et géographique de l'Orénoque*, Vol. I, p. 211.

standing features of the indigenous American character.*

One might likewise name quite a number of the dark-skinned tribes of Africa whose tender care for their children has attracted the attention of travellers.**

In a word, the empirical data at the disposal of modern ethnology do not corroborate Bücher's view in this case either.

What was the source of his error? It was that he put a wrong interpretation on the fairly widespread custom among savages of killing children and old folk. To infer from the practice of killing children and old folk that there is no mutual attachment between children and parents seems, at a first glance, quite logical. But it only *seems* so, and only *at a first glance*.

Infanticide, for instance, is very widespread among the Australian aborigines. In 1860, the Narrinyeri tribe killed one-third of their new-born infants: every child born in a family where there were already little children was slain; so were all malformed infants, twins, etc. But this does not signify that the Australians of this tribe were bereft of parental feeling. On the contrary, having decided that such and such an infant was to remain alive, they tended it "*with boundless patience*."*** As you see, the matter is by no means as simple as it first appeared: infanticide did not prevent the Australians from loving their children and tending them patiently. And this is not only true of the Australians. Infanticide was practised in ancient Sparta, but does it follow that the Spartans had not yet attained the level of cultural

* *Die Indianer Nordamerikas*, Leipzig, 1865, p. 101. See Matilda Stevenson, "The Sia," in the *Eleventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Smithsonian Institute*. She says that when food is short the adults go hungry but feed their children.

** See, for instance, what Schweinfurth says of the Diurs, in *Au cœur de l'Afrique*, Vol. I, p. 210.

*** Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, Vol. I, pp. 338-39.

development at which parents conceive a love for their children?

As to the slaying of the sick and aged, it is essential to bear in mind the conditions in which it occurs. It is only practised when the old people have become decrepit and are no longer able to accompany their fellow-clansmen on the march.* Since the means of transport at the disposal of savages is inadequate for the conveyance of such decrepit members of the clan, they are compelled of necessity to abandon them to their fate, in which case death at a friendly hand is the least conceivable evil. It should also be remembered that the abandoning or slaying of old folk is put off to the last possible moment, and therefore occurs very rarely even among the tribes which are most notorious for this practice. Ratzel says that, despite Darwin's statement, so often repeated, that the Terra Fuegians eat their old women, aged people are held in high respect by this tribe.** Earle says the same of the Negritos of the Philippine Islands,*** and Ehrenreich (quoting Martius) of the Brazilian Botocudos.**** The North American Indians were reported by Heckewelder to have a greater reverence for their old folk than any

* See Lafitau, *Les mœurs des sauvages, etc.*, Vol. I, p. 490; also Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, Vol. I, p. 217. Catlin says that in such cases the old people themselves insist on being killed, on the plea of their senility (ibid., p. 217). I must confess that for a long time I had my doubts about this latter statement. But tell me, sir, do you think that the following passage in Tolstoi's *Master and Man* sins against psychological truth: "Nikita passed away sincerely rejoicing that his death would relieve his son and daughter-in-law of the burden of feeding an extra mouth," etc. In my opinion, there is nothing psychologically untrue in this. And if there is not, then there is nothing psychologically impossible in Catlin's statement either.

** *Völkerkunde*, Vol. I, p. 524.

*** *Native Races of the Indian Archipelago*, p. 133.

**** "Ueber die Botokudos, etc." *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vol. XIX, p. 32.

other people.* Schweinfurth says of the African Diurs that they not only take tender care of their children, but respect their old people, and that this is to be seen in every village.** And according to Stanley, respect for old folk is the general rule throughout inner Africa.***

Bücher takes an abstract view of a phenomenon that can only be explained if treated quite concretely. Primitive man is led to kill old folk—as well as children—not by his character, or his supposed individualism, or the absence of living ties between the generations, but by the conditions in which the savage has to wage his struggle for existence. In my first letter I recalled Darwin's assumption that if human beings lived in the same conditions as hive-bees, they would kill the unproductive members of their society without a twinge of conscience, and even with the gratifying sense of performing a duty. In more or less degree, savages live in conditions in which the extermination of unproductive members becomes a moral obligation to society. And to the extent to which they find themselves in such conditions, to that extent they are *compelled* to kill redundant children and decrepit folk. That, despite this, they are not the egotists and individualists Bücher makes them out to be, is shown by the examples I have given in such abundance. The same conditions of savage life that lead to the slaying of children and old people, likewise lead to the maintenance of close ties between the surviving members of the clan. This explains the paradox that killing of children and old folk is sometimes practised by tribes in which parental feeling and respect for old people is strongly developed. The explanation lies not in the *psychology* of the savage, but in his *economic* conditions.

Before concluding my examination of Bücher's views

* Op. cit., p. 251.

** *Au cœur de l'Afrique*, Vol. I, p. 210.

*** *Dans les ténèbres de l'Afrique*, Vol. II, p. 361.

on the character of primitive man, I must make two more remarks concerning them.

The first is that, in his eyes, one of the most striking manifestations of the individualism he attributes to savages is the very widespread custom among them of each consuming his food in solitude.

My second remark is this. With many primitive peoples each member of the family has his own moveable property, to which the other members of the family have not the least right, and which as a rule they show no disposition to claim. Not infrequently some members of a big family live separately from the others in small huts. Bücher regards this as a manifestation of extreme individualism. He would be of a different opinion if he were acquainted with the customs of the big peasant families which were once so numerous in Great Russia. The household economy of such families was purely communistic; yet despite this, the individual members of the family—the *babi* and *devki*, for instance—might have their own moveable property, which custom firmly protected against the encroachment of even the most despotic *bolshak*. It was often the case that separate huts were built for married members of such big families in the common courtyard. (In the Tambov Province they were called *khatki*.)*

It is quite possible that you are already thoroughly bored with these reflections on the economy of primitive peoples. But you will admit that I simply could not dispense with them. As I have already said, art is a social phenomenon, and if the savage really were a complete individualist, it would be vain for us to inquire into the character of his art, for we should not find him displaying the slightest trace of artistic activity. But that he does, is beyond all doubt: primitive art is not a myth. This fact alone might serve as a convincing, though in-

* *Babi*—married women; *devki*—marriageable girls; *bolshak*—patriarchal head of the family; *khatki*—hutlets.—*Tr.*

direct, refutation of Bücher's view on the "primitive economic system."

Bücher often repeats the thought that "because his life was one of constant wandering, man was entirely engrossed with the concern for his subsistence to the exclusion even of sentiments which we consider most natural."* Yet this self-same Bücher, as you already know, is firmly convinced that over the course of immeasurable centuries man lived without working, and that even today there are many places where the geographical conditions are such as to permit man to exist with a minimal exertion of effort. To this our author adds the conviction that art is older than the production of useful things, just as play is older than work. It follows:

first, that primitive man was able to subsist with the most insignificant exertion of effort;

second, that this insignificant effort nevertheless absorbed primitive man's energies so completely as to leave no room for any other activity, or even for any of those sentiments which seem to us natural;

third, that man, though he had no thought save for his subsistence, did not begin with the production of things that might at least be useful for his subsistence, but with the satisfaction of his esthetic requirements.

This is strange indeed. The contradiction is obvious; but how is it to be resolved?

It cannot be resolved unless we realize the erroneousness of Bücher's views on the relation of art to activity aimed at the production of useful things.

Bücher is very much mistaken when he says that manufacturing industry everywhere began with ornamentation of the body. He has not—and, of course, *could not*—cite a single fact that might lead us to think that ornamentation of the body, or tattooing, antecedes the making of primitive weapons or primitive implements of labour. Of

the not very numerous bodily ornaments of some of the Botocudo tribes, the chief is the celebrated *botoque*, a piece of wood inserted into the lip.* It would be strange in the extreme to assume that the Botocudos used this piece of wood as an ornament before they learned to hunt, or at least to dig nutritious roots out of the ground with the help of a pointed stick. R. Semon says that many of the Australian tribes have no ornaments at all.** This, probably, is not quite so: it is probable that all Australian tribes use ornaments of some kind, even if very few and of the most simple kind. But here again it is impossible to assume that these ornaments, however simple and few in number, appeared earlier among the Australians, and occupied a bigger place in their activity, than concern for their subsistence and the making of the corresponding instruments of labour, that is, weapons and pointed sticks used for obtaining vegetable food. The Sarrasins think that among the primitive Veddahs, before they had known the influence of a foreign culture, *ornaments were not used* by man, woman or child, and that even today one may meet Veddahs in the mountainous areas who are distinguished by a complete absence of ornament.*** These Veddahs do not even pierce the ears, yet they are already familiar with the use of weapons, and they already make them themselves. It is obvious that with these Veddahs manufacturing industry concerned with the making of weapons was anterior to manufacturing industry concerned with the making of ornaments.

It is true that graphic art is practised even by very low hunting tribes—the Bushmen and Australians, for instance: they have regular picture galleries, of which

* Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, Part III, p. 446.

** *Im australischen Busche und an den Küsten des Korallenmeeres*, Leipzig, 1896, p. 223.

*** *Die Veddahs von Ceylon*, p. 395.

I shall have occasion to speak in other letters.* The Chukchi and Eskimos are known for their sculpture and carving.** No less distinctive were the artistic proclivities of the tribes which inhabited Europe at the time of the mammoth.*** All these facts are very important and cannot be ignored by any historian of art. But what grounds are there for saying that the Australians, the Bushmen, the Eskimos or the contemporaries of the mammoth engaged in artistic activity *before* the production of useful things; that with them art was "older" than work? No grounds whatever. On the contrary, the character of the artistic activity of the primitive hunter testifies quite unequivocally that with him the production of useful things and economic activity generally preceded the beginnings of artistic activity and laid a very strong impress upon it. What do the drawings of the Chukchi depict? They depict scenes from the hunting mode of life.**** Clearly, the Chukchi engaged in hunting before they began to reproduce it in their drawings. Similarly, if the Bushmen draw animals almost exclusively—peacocks, elephants, hippopotami, ostriches, etc.)—it is because animals play an immense and decisive part in their life as hunters. At first, man came to stand

* On the pictures of the Australians, see Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, Part 6, pp. 759 et seq.; see also the interesting article by R. G. Mathews, "The Rock Pictures of the Australian Aborigines," in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia*, Vols. X and XI. On Bushmen paintings, see the already quoted work of Fritsch on the natives of South Africa, Vol. I, pp. 425-27.

** See *Die Umseglung Asiens und Europas auf der "Vega"*, by A. E. Nordenskjöld, Leipzig, 1880, Vol. I, p. 463, and Vol. II, pp. 125, 127, 129, 135, 141, 231.

*** Cf. *Die Urgeschichte des Menschen nach dem heutigen Stande der Wissenschaft*, by Dr. M. Hörnes, first half-volume, pp. 191 et seq., 213 et seq. Many facts on this point are given by Mortillet in his *Le Préhistorique*.

**** Nordenskjöld, Vol. II, pp. 132, 133, 135.

) Fritsch, *Die Eingeborenen Süd-Afrikas*, Vol. I, p. 426.

in a definite relation to animals (began to hunt them), and only then—and precisely because he stood in such a relation to them—did he conceive the desire to draw these animals. Which was anterior to which: work to art, or art to work?

No, sir, I am firmly convinced that the history of primitive art will be totally incomprehensible if we do not grasp that *work is older than art*, and that, generally, *man first looked upon objects and phenomena from the utilitarian standpoint, and only later did he begin to regard them from the esthetic standpoint.*

I shall give many—and in my opinion quite convincing—proofs of this thought in my next letter, which, however, I shall have to begin with an examination of how far the old and generally known practice of dividing peoples *into hunting, pastoral and agricultural*, accords with the present state of our ethnological knowledge.



FIFTH LETTER⁶



Dear Sir,
In the concluding part of my first letter I said that I would show in the next letter how easily the art of primitive peoples—what the Germans call *Naturvölker*—can be explained from the standpoint of the materialist conception of history. I must now carry out my promise.

But I want first of all to come to agreement with you again respecting terminology. What do we mean by primitive tribes? Who are the *Naturvölker*?

The term *Naturvölker* is usually applied to those very many and diversified tribes whose cultural development has not yet reached the stage of *civilization*. But what is the border-line dividing civilized from uncivilized peoples?

Lewis H. Morgan, in his well-known book *Ancient Society*, assumes that the era of civilization begins with the invention of a phonetic alphabet and the use of writing. I think that it is difficult to agree with Morgan without very substantial reservations. But that is not the point. No matter how far back we put the border-line

between civilized and uncivilized peoples, we shall have to admit that the latter include an extremely large number of tribes standing at very different levels of culture. Consequently, the data that must here be taken into consideration are very extensive and diversified. True, the influence of racial peculiarities, if it exists at all in this case, is so small as to be almost impossible to detect: there is hardly any difference between the art of one race and that of another. "Primitive art, that universal language of mankind," Lübke says, "covered the earth with monuments of a uniform kind, relics of which are to be found over an area stretching from the Pacific Islands to the banks of the Mississippi, and from the shores of the Baltic to the Greek Archipelago."* In the overwhelming majority of cases, therefore, we may consider this influence as practically nil. This, of course, greatly facilitates our task. But it still remains a very difficult one, for the uncivilized peoples include both the Australian and Polynesian tribes and the vast majority of the inhabitants of African tribes, which belong to very different stages of savagery and barbarism. How are we to orient ourselves in these data?

Why do we examine the art of primitive peoples separately from the art of civilized peoples? Because with the latter technological and economic influences are greatly obscured by the division of society into classes and the resultant class antagonisms. Consequently, the more remote a tribe is from such division, the more does it provide suitable data for my investigation. Which tribes are most remote from the social system characteristic of civilized peoples, that is, from division of society into classes? Those whose productive forces are least developed. And the tribes whose productive forces are least developed are the so-called *hunting* tribes, which subsist by fishing, hunting, and the gathering of the fruits and

roots of wild plants. I shall therefore turn primarily to them, and to those which are nearest to them in cultural development. Higher tribes, the African Negroes for instance, will be called into service only to the extent that they modify or corroborate the results obtained from the study of the hunting tribes.

DANCES

I shall begin with dances, which play a very important part in the life of all primitive tribes.

"The distinguishing feature of the dance," Ernst Grose says, "is the rhythmical order of its movements. There is no dance without rhythm."* We already know from the first letter that the faculty to perceive and to enjoy musical rhythm is rooted in the properties of human (and not only human) nature. But how does this ability manifest itself in the dance? *What do the rhythmical movements of the dancers signify?* In what relation do they stand to their manner of life, their mode of production?

Dances are sometimes simple imitations of the movements of animals. Such, for example, are the Australian frog, butterfly, emu, dingo and kangaroo dances. Such, too, are the bear and buffalo dances of the North American Indians. And, probably, such Brazilian Indian dances as the "*fish*" dance and the *bat dance* of the Bakairi tribe should also be assigned to this category.**

These dances reveal a faculty for imitation. The Australian, in his kangaroo dance, imitates the movements of that animal so effectively that, as Eyre says, his mimicry would evoke a storm of applause in any European theatre.***7

...how she climbs a tree to catch an opossum; how she dives for shells; or how she digs nourishing roots

* *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, p. 198.

** Von den Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Brasiliens*, p. 300.

*** *Journal of Expeditions of Discovery*, Vol. II, p. 223.

out of the ground. The men have similar dances—as, for example, the Australian scullers' dance, or the dance the New Zealanders had which depicted the making of a canoe. All these dances are a simple representation of production processes. They are deserving of great attention because they are a remarkable example of the close connection between primitive artistic activity and production activity. But, naturally, social organizations arise which correspond to them. With primitive hunters, such organizations cannot be extensive owing to the very conditions of their hunting mode of life, that is, because the subsistence provided by hunting is very meagre and insecure. Eyre says of the Australians that "the number travelling together depends in a great measure upon the period of the year and the description of food that may be in season."* But, generally, an Australian horde does not consist of more than 50 persons. The Acti of the Philippines live in hordes of 20-30 persons; Bushmen hordes consist of 20-40 families; there may be as many as one hundred persons in a Botocudo horde, etc.** Even a horde embracing 40 families, or 200 persons, is insignificant in size. These conditions of life also lead to frequent collisions between independent hordes of primitive hunters. According to T. Waitz, most of the wars of the Red Indian tribes of North America were over the right to hunt in a certain territory.*** How such wars arise is very well shown by a conversation Stanley had with members of one of the Negro tribes of Central Africa. "Do you always fight your neighbours?" he asked them. "No; some of our young men go into the woods to hunt game; and they are surprised by our neighbours; then we go to them, and they come to fight us until one party is tired,

* Ibid., p. 218.

** See the interesting and important work of H. Cunow, "Les bases économiques du matriarchat," in *Le Devenir social*, January, February and April 1898.

***, *Die Indianer Nordamericas*, p. 115.

or one is beaten.”* The frequently recurring clashes of primitive tribes arouse feelings of mutual hatred and unsatisfied vengeance, which in turn lead to further clashes.** As a result, the primitive hunting tribes have to be continually on the alert against hostile attack.*** And since their numbers are too small and their resources too poor to enable them to assign from their midst a special category of warriors, each hunter has also to be a warrior, and the *ideal warrior* is therefore considered the *ideal man*. Schoolcraft says of the North American Indians that the whole power of public opinion is directed to converting the young men into fearless warriors and breeding in them a thirst for martial glory.**** This, too, is the object of many of their religious rites; it is not surprising that their dancing art is directed to the same end. This is how. . . .¹⁰

If complete correspondence of form and content is the first and principal earmark of a genuine work of art, it has to be admitted that the war dances of the primitive peoples are artistic in the full meaning of the term. How far this is true, is shown by the following description of a war dance seen by Stanley in Equatorial Africa.

“... Thirty-three lines of thirty-three men each... in the form of a perfect and solid and close square. . . . Each

* *Dans les ténèbres de l'Afrique*, 1890, Vol. II, p. 91. Ratzel, it is true, remarks that the cause of war among the New Zealanders is often the desire to taste human flesh. (*Völkerkunde*, Vol. I, p. 93.) But war in this case is to be regarded as a variety of hunting. It should be observed that among primitive peoples war often arises for reasons which with us would be the subject of examination by a justice of the peace. But in order that disputants might recognize the authority of a magistrate, an organization of public authority would be required of a kind that is quite impossible at the hunting stage of development.

** (From Sieber.)⁸

*** Here from Martius.⁹

**** *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, Philadelphia, 1851, Vol. II, p. 57.

man was forcefully stamping the ground . . . and the phalanx moved slowly but irresistibly. . . . The thousand heads rose and drooped together, rising when venting the glorious volume of energy, drooping with the undertone of wailing murmur of the multitude. . . . As they shouted with faces turned upward and heads bent back to give the fullest effect to the ascending tempest of voices . . . it appeared to inflate every soul with the passion of deadly battle and every eye of the onlookers glowed luridly, and their right arms with clenched fists were shaken on high as though their spirits were filled with the martial strains; but as the heads were turned and bowed to the earth we seemed to feel war's agony, and grief, and woe, to think of tears, and widows' wails, and fatherless orphans' cries, of ruined hearths and a desolated land. . . ." Stanley adds that it was certainly one of the best and most exciting exhibitions he had seen in Africa.*

Thus the war dances of the primitive hunting peoples are artistic productions which express emotions and ideals that must have developed necessarily and naturally in the conditions of their specific mode of life. And as their mode of life was entirely determined by the state of their productive forces, we have to admit that, in the final analysis, the state of the productive forces determined the character of their war dances. This is the more evident since with them, as I have already said, every warrior is at the same time a hunter, and they employ the same weapons in war as in the chase.

The invocatory and funeral dances of the hunting tribes likewise stand in the closest causal connection with their mode of life. Primitive man believes in the existence of more or less numerous spirits, but his attitude to these supernatural forces is entirely confined to attempts

* *Dans les ténèbres de l'Afrique*, Vol. I, pp. 405, 406, 407.

to exploit them in his own interest.* In order to propitiate a spirit, the savage tries to please it in one way or another. He seeks to bribe it with tempting food ("sacrifice"), or perform in its honour those dances from which he himself derives the greatest pleasure. African Negroes, when they succeed in killing an elephant, not infrequently execute a dance around it in honour of the spirits.** That such dances are connected with the hunting mode of life is self-evident. Its influence on the *funeral* dances will be no less evident when we remember that when a man dies he becomes a *spirit*, whom the survivors try to propitiate in the same way as they propitiate other spirits.***

The *love* dances of primitive peoples are to our eyes the height of indecency. It goes without saying that dances of this type have no *direct* connection with any economic activity. Their mimicry is an unconcealed expression of an elementary physiological need and, probably, has no little in common with the love mimicry of the anthropoid apes. Of course the hunting mode of life is not without its influence on these dances too, but it could influence them only to the extent that it determined the *mutual relations of the sexes in primitive society*.

I see you, sir, rubbing your hands in satisfaction. "Aha," you exclaim, "so even with primitive man not all his needs by far are connected with his particular modes of production and forms of economy! His love emotion shows this very clearly. But once we grant even a single

* This attitude is often to be found also among African Negroes whose cultural development is already well above that of the true *hunting* tribes. This is how a Swiss missionary describes the "religion" of the Guamba Negroes of Africa: "Le système se tient d'une façon, etc." ["The system is maintained with the help of, etc."] P. 59.

** Paul du Chaillu, *Voyages et aventures dans l'Afrique équatoriale*, Paris, 1863, p. 306.

*** The Brazilian Indians sing *hunting* songs at funeral ceremonies (von den Steinen, p. 493); other songs would be far less appropriate at the burial of a hunter.

exception to the general rule, then however great the importance of the economic factor may be, it cannot be regarded as exclusive, and therefore your whole materialist explanation of history falls to the ground."

I hasten to explain. It has never entered the head of any supporter of the materialist explanation to assert that men's economic relations create and determine their basic physiological needs. The sexual emotion existed, of course, with our ape-like progenitors already in those remote times when they were still unfamiliar even with the slightest rudiments of *productive* activity.

The relations between the sexes are indeed determined by this emotion. But at the various stages of man's cultural development these relations assume different *forms*, depending on the development of the family, which, in its turn, is determined by the development of the productive forces and the character of the social and economic relations.

The same must be said of *religious* ideas. Nothing occurs in nature without cause. In man's psychology, this is reflected in a need to discover the cause of the phenomena which interest him. His stock of knowledge being extremely small, primitive man "*judges from himself*" and ascribes natural phenomena to the deliberate action of conscious forces. This is the origin of *animism*. The relation in which animism stands to the productive forces of primitive man is that its sphere grows narrower in direct proportion to the growth of man's power over nature. But this, of course, does not mean that animism owes its origin to the *economic* form of primitive society. No, animistic ideas owe their origin to man's nature, but their development, and the influence they exert on man's social conduct, are determined in the final analysis by economic relations. Originally, in fact, animistic ideas, and belief in an after-life in particular, have no influence whatever on men's inter-relations, since they are entirely unassociated with any expectation of punishment for bad

conduct and award for good conduct. Only very gradually do they become associated with the practical morality of primitive men. The latter, say, begin to believe—as the inhabitants of the Torres Strait Islands, for example, believe—that beyond the grave the souls of brave warriors lead a happier life than the souls of ordinary people. This belief exerts a most undoubted, and sometimes very strong, influence on the conduct of the believers. And in this sense primitive religion is unquestionably a “factor” of social development; but the practical importance of this factor entirely depends on precisely what actions are prescribed by those rules of practical reason with which the animistic ideas are associated, and this is exclusively determined by the social relations which arise on the given economic basis.* Therefore, if primitive religion acquires importance as a factor of social development, that importance is entirely rooted in economics.**

That is why facts which show that art not infrequently developed under the strong influence of religion in no way detract from the truth of the materialist conception of history. I thought it necessary, sir, to draw your attention to this point because those who forget it are apt to fall victim to the most comical misunderstandings and often resemble Don Quixote fighting the windmills.

* It is probably this circumstance that Emile Burnouf had in mind when he said: “Si la morale des nations est un produit de leurs mœurs, comme cela est incontestable il faut donc voir dans l'état social de l'homme une cause de diversité religieuse.” [“If the morals of nations are a product of their customs, which is incontestable, then the social state of man must be regarded as a cause of the diversity of religions.”]¹¹

** I want to remark that I use the term “factor” in this case very reluctantly. Strictly speaking, there is only one factor of social development, namely, social man, who acts, thinks, feels and believes in one or another way, depending on what form his economy takes with the development of his productive forces. People who dispute about the historical significance of various factors often, without themselves observing it, *hypostatize* abstract concepts.

I also want to make the following point: the first permanent division of labour is its division as between man and woman in primitive society. While the men engage in hunting and war, to the lot of the women falls the gathering of wild roots and fruits (also shells), care of the children and the household duties generally. This division of labour is reflected in the dances: each sex has its own separate dances; the two sexes dance together only on rare occasions. Von den Steinen, describing the festivals of the Brazilian Indians, observes that if the women do not take part in the hunting dances which accompany these festivals, it is because hunting is not a female occupation.* This is perfectly true, and it should be added, as Steinen likewise points out, that on such festivals the women are more busy with household duties, preparing food for the entertainment of guests, than at other times.

I have said that animistic ideas become associated with primitive morality only very gradually. This is now a generally known fact.**

But this generally known fact is in sharp contradiction to the opinion of Count Lev Tolstoi to which I drew your attention in the first letter,¹³ the opinion, namely, that always and everywhere ("in every society") the consciousness of good and bad inherent in all members of society is a *religious* consciousness. The diverse and picturesque dances which hold such an important place in the art of primitive peoples express and depict emotions and actions that are of essential significance in their life. They therefore have a very direct relation to what is "good and bad," but in the vast majority of cases they have no connection whatever with primitive "religion." Count Tolstoi's idea is mistaken even in relation to the Catholic peoples of the Middle Ages, with whom the

* Loc. cit., p. 298.

** See Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, also Marillier's *La survivance de l'âme et l'idée de justice chez les peuples noncivilisés*, Paris, 1894.¹²

association of religious ideas with practical morals was already incomparably firmer and extended to a far wider sphere. Even with these peoples the consciousness of "good and bad" was far from always a religious consciousness, and therefore the emotions conveyed by art often did not bear the slightest relation to religion.

But while the consciousness of good and bad is far from always a *religious* consciousness, it is nevertheless unquestionable that art acquires social significance only to the extent that it depicts, evokes or *conveys actions, emotions or events which are of great importance to society.*

We have seen this in the case of dances; the Brazilian *fish dances* are just as closely connected with phenomena on which the life of the tribe depends as is the North American *scalp dance*, or the *shell-fishing dance* of the Australian women. True, none of these dances is of direct benefit either to the dancers or to the spectators. Here, as always, the beautiful is enjoyed quite apart from any utilitarian consideration. But the *individual* may enjoy quite disinterestedly that which is very beneficial to the *race* (society). Here we have a repetition of what we see in the case of morality: if those actions are moral which the individual performs despite any considerations of personal benefit, this does not mean that morality bears no relation to social benefit. Quite the contrary, the self-sacrifice of the *individual* has meaning only to the extent that it is beneficial to the race. The Kantian definition—*Schön ist das, was ohne alles Interesse wohlgefällt**—is therefore wrong. But what shall we substitute for it? Can we say: the beautiful is that which *pleases* us irrespective of our own personal benefit? No, that would be inaccurate. Just as the work of an artist—even a collective

* "The beautiful is that which pleases irrespective of benefit."
—Tr.

artist—is to him an end in itself, so people who enjoy an artistic production (be it Sophocles' "Antigone," or Michelangelo's "Night," or the "scullers' dance") forget all practical ends generally, and the benefit of the race in particular.

Consequently, enjoyment of artistic productions is the *enjoyment* of that (be it objects, phenomena or states of mind) which is beneficial to the race, *irrespective* of any conscious consideration of benefit.

An artistic production, whether its medium be images or sounds, acts upon our *contemplative faculty*, not our *logical faculty*, and there is, therefore, no esthetic enjoyment when the sight of an artistic production evokes in us nothing but considerations of its benefit to society. Here there is only a *surrogate* of esthetic enjoyment, namely, the satisfaction provided by these considerations. But since the considerations are prompted by the given artistic image, we, by a psychological aberration, believe that our enjoyment is caused by the *image*, whereas, actually, it is caused by the *thoughts* it evokes, and, consequently, is rooted in the functioning of our *logical faculty*, and not of our *contemplative faculty*. It is to the latter faculty that the real artist always appeals, whereas tendentious art always seeks to arouse in us considerations of the general good—that is, in the final analysis, acts upon our logical faculty.

It should however be remembered that, *historically* speaking, the *consciously utilitarian* attitude to objects often preceded the *esthetic* attitude to them. Ratzel, who does not approve the tendency of many investigators of primitive customs to impute consciousness where it could not have existed,* is nevertheless himself obliged to appeal to it in several important instances. It is known, for example, that savages nearly everywhere anoint their bodies with grease, with the sap of certain plants, or

* *Völkerkunde*, Vol. I, Preface, p. 69.

simply with clay. This custom plays a great role in primitive cosmetics. But what was its origin? Ratzel thinks that the Hottentots, who anoint their bodies with the sap of an aromatic plant called *Buchu*, do so *as a protection against insects*. And he adds that if these same Hottentots anoint their hair with particular thoroughness, *it is with a view to protection against the rays of the sun*.^{*} A similar supposition was already made by the Jesuit Lafitau in respect to the custom of the North American Indians of *greasing* their bodies with oil.^{**} It is very strongly and convincingly supported today by von den Steinen. Speaking of the custom the Brazilian Indians have of daubing their bodies with coloured clay, he remarks that they must have originally observed that clay freshens the skin and guards it against gnats, and only later did it occur to them that a body becomes more beautiful when daubed with clay. "I myself am of the opinion," he adds, "that pleasure is at the bottom of ornamentation, just as an accumulation of excess energy is at the bottom of play; but the objects which serve as ornaments originally become known to men because of their usefulness. With our (Brazilian) Indians, the useful goes hand in hand with the ornamental, and we have every reason to believe that the former was anterior to the latter."^{***}

Originally, therefore, primitive man daubed himself with clay, oil or sap because it was useful.^{****} Then there

* *Völkerkunde*, Vol. I, p. 92.

** *Les mœurs des sauvages américains*, Paris, 1724, Vol. II, p. 59: "Les huiles dont les sauvages se graissent les rendent extrêmement puants et crasseux.... Mais ces huiles leur sont absolument nécessaires, et ils sont mangés de vermine quand elles leur manquent." ["The oils with which the savages grease their bodies make them terribly smelly and dirty.... But these oils are absolutely necessary; without them they are eaten by vermin."]

*** *Unter den Naturvölkern Brasiliens*, p. 174. See also p. 186.

**** Joest rightly says: "Hier liegen ja auch Beispiele aus dem Tierleben vor. Büffel, Elephanten, Nielpferde u.s.w. nehmen häufig

came a time when a body so anointed appeared to him *beautiful*, and he began to practise anointment for *esthetic pleasure*. Once this moment had come, many and diverse "factors" appeared whose influence determined the *subsequent evolution* of the primitive cosmetic art. Thus, according to Burton, the Negroes of the Wajiji tribe (Eastern Africa) love to cover their heads with lime, whose white colour sets off their dark skin in handsome contrast. For the same reason, the Wajiji are fond of wearing *dazzlingly white* ornaments made of the teeth of the hippopotamus.* Similarly, the Brazilian Indians, according to von den Steinen, prefer to buy beads of *blue colour, which stand out more effectively against their skin*.** Generally, the action of contrast (the principle of antithesis) plays a very big part in such cases.***

Equally strong, of course, if not stronger, is the influence of the *mode of life* of the primitive peoples. The desire to appear *as terrible as possible* to an enemy may have been another reason—in addition to the above-mentioned—for the origin of the custom of anointing or painting the body. "When a savage, in the course of the chase or in a victorious battle with an enemy, happened to become smeared with blood and mud, he could not but have noticed the impression of mingled horror and

Schlamm-bäder mit der unverkennbaren Absicht, sich durch den irdenen Panzer vor Fliegen-, Mücken- u.s.w. Stichen zu schützen. Dass also der Mensch dasselbe that, bezw. es noch thut, ist naheliegend." ["Similar examples are provided by animal life. Buffaloes, elephants, hippopotami and other animals often take mud-baths with the obvious intention of protecting themselves with an armour of mud against the bites of flies, mosquitoes, etc. That man did, and still does, the same, is understandable."] *Tätowieren, Narbenzeichnen und Körperbemalen*, Berlin, 1887, p. 19.

* Burton, *Voyage aux grands lacs de l'Afrique Orientale*, pp. 411-13.

** Loc. cit., p. 185.

*** Cf. Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, Vol. I, Preface, p. 69; Grosse, *Anfänge der Kunst*, pp. 61 et seq.

revulsion he produced on the people around him, and they in their turn must have tried to produce the same impression for their own ends.”*

We know, in fact, that after a successful hunt, some savage tribes smear themselves with the blood of the animals they have slain.** We likewise know that primitive warriors put on red paint when setting out for war or when preparing for the war dance. Probably, too, the habit of painting the body red—the colour of blood—gradually grew and became prevalent among warriors from a desire to please the women who, owing to their domestic way of life, must have been contemptuous of men who were wanting in belligerency.*** Other causes led to the use of different colours; some Australian tribes smear themselves with *white* clay in token of mourning for the dead. Grosse makes the interesting observation**** that the colour of mourning is *black* among the white Europeans, and *white* among the black Australians. What is the

* Loc. cit., p. 19.

** Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, Vol. II, p. 567.

*** “The fights are sometimes witnessed by ... the women and the children. The presence of the females may be supposed probably to inspire the belligerents with courage and incite them to deeds of daring.” Eyre, loc. cit., p. 223. “Les usages veulent aussi qu’avant de prendre une femme le jeune cafre ait accompli certains actes de courage ou ait reçu le baptême du sang: tant que sa sagaie n’a pas été lavée avec du sang de l’ennemi, il ne peut se marier; de là la véritable frénésie que porta les guerriers zoulous jusque sur la gueule des canons anglais lors de la dernière guerre et leur fit commettre des actes d’une audace et d’une témérité incomparables.” [“Custom likewise demands that before taking a wife the young Kafir shall have performed certain acts of courage or received the baptism of blood: so long as his *assagai* has not been bathed in the blood of an enemy he cannot marry. Hence the veritable frenzy which in the late war carried the Zulu warriors to the very mouth of the English cannon or prompted them to deeds of incomparable audacity and temerity.”] Edouard Foà, *Du Cap au Lac Nyassa*, Paris, 1897, pp. 81-82.

**** *Anfänge der Kunst*, p. 54.

explanation? I think it is this.* Primitive tribes are usually very proud of the physical peculiarities of their race. A white skin seems very ugly to dark-skinned peoples.** They therefore try in the ordinary course of life to set off and *accentuate the darkness* of their skins. And if mourning induces them to paint themselves in *white colour*, this is probably due to the operation of the already familiar principle of antithesis. But another assumption is possible. Joest thinks that primitive man paints himself on the death of a relative only in order that the dead man's spirit might not be able to recognize him if it should conceive the premature desire to carry him off to the realm of the spirits.*** If this assumption is correct—and there is nothing improbable in it—then dark-skinned tribes prefer white paint merely as the best means of rendering themselves unrecognizable.

However that may be, it is undoubtable that *anointing* the skin very soon develops into the more complicated habit of *painting* it.**** And the anointing process itself ceases to be as simple a matter as it was originally. In Africa, some of the Negro pastoral tribes consider it good form to smear their bodies with a goodly layer of

* "Il est notoire que sur presque tous les points du globe les mères cherchent, par des moyens externes, à rendre les plus marqués possibles, chez leurs enfants, les signes de leur nationalité." ["It is notorious that in nearly all parts of the globe mothers endeavour, by external means, to make the signs of nationality in their children as conspicuous as possible."] Schweinfurth, *loc. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 256.

** "'What would you think of these whites as husbands?'" Burton's interpreter used to ask Negro girls, pointing to his white companions. "'Fiel Not by any means!'" was the unanimous reply, accompanied by peals of laughter." *Voyage, etc.*, p. 58.

*** *Op. cit.*, p. 22.

**** "The Ojampi of South America are fond of painting not only themselves in red or yellow, but also their dogs and tame monkeys." Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, Vol. II, p. 568.

butter*; others prefer to use the ashes of cow dung or cow urine for the same purpose. Here butter, dung or urine are the hall-mark of wealth, since they are a form of anointment available only to owners of cattle.** It may be that butter and cow dung are a better protection for the skin than wood ash. If this is really so, then butter or dung was substituted for ashes with the development of cattle-breeding from *purely utilitarian* considerations. But once the substitution had occurred, a body smeared with butter or the ash of cow dung began to evoke more pleasant esthetic feelings than a body smeared with bark ash. Nor is this all. A man who anointed his body with butter or dung thereby graphically demonstrated to his fellows that he was not without substance. Here too, obviously, the prosaic pleasure of giving this demonstration was anterior to the *esthetic* pleasure of seeing one's body covered with a layer of dung or butter.

But primitive man not only *anoints* and *paints* his skin. He also cicatrizes it in definite, and often extremely intricate, patterns; he also practises *tattooing*, and does so with the obvious purpose of ornamenting his person. Can it be said that in the case of tattooing also, the approach from the standpoint of *use* was anterior to the approach from the standpoint of *esthetic pleasure*?

You know, sir, that there are two kinds of tattooing: 1) tattooing proper, and 2) the tracing of patterns on the skin with the help of *cicatrices*. Tattooing proper is the introduction into the skin by mechanical means of certain dyeing substances which, arranged in a definite

* "Une couche de beurre fondu... fait l'orgueil des puissants et des belles." ["The skin... drips with ghee (melted butter), the pride of rank and beauty."] Burton, *Voyage aux grands lacs de l'Afrique Orientale*, p. 265.

** Schweinfurth says that among the Chillooks the poor smear their bodies with wood ash, while the well-to-do use cow dung. *Au cœur de l'Afrique*, Vol. I, p. 82.

order, form a more or less permanent pattern.* The decoration of the skin with the help of weals caused by cicatrization or cauterization is sometimes called, in distinction to tattooing, by the Australian word *Manka*.** Tribes which practise cicatrization as a general rule do not practise tattooing, and vice versa. But why do some tribes prefer cicatrization, and others tattooing? This is easy to understand when it is borne in mind that cicatrization is practised by *dark-skinned*, and tattooing by *light-skinned* peoples. Indeed, if the skin of a Negro is cut and the healing process is artificially retarded so as to induce suppuration, the pigmentation destroyed by the suppuration will not be restored, and the result will be the formation of a pallid weal.*** Such weals stand out distinctly against the dark skin, which can thus be ornamented in any desired pattern. Dark-skinned tribes may therefore content themselves with cicatrization, the more so that a pattern made by tattooing is not so conspicuous on a dark skin. The case of light-skinned tribes is different. Cicatrices are much less effective on their skins, which however are quite suitable for tattooing. Here, therefore, it is the colour of the skin that is decisive.

But this fact does not explain the *origin* of *Manka* and tattooing. What induces dark-skinned tribes to cicatrize their skins, and why do light-skinned tribes find it necessary to tattoo themselves?****

* Cf. W. Joest, op. cit., p. 8.

** Cf. lecture by M. Haberlandt, "Über die Verbreitung und den Sinn der Tätowierung," in 15th volume of *Mitteilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*.

*** See the explanation given by von Langer at the monthly meeting of the Vienna Anthropological Society on February 10, 1885 (*Mitteilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*).

**** For brevity's sake, I shall in future use the term *tattooing* to denote both methods of ornamenting the skin, and shall employ the more exact terminology only when it is essential in order to avoid misunderstanding.

Some of the North American tribes *tattoo* their skins with the figures of the animals whom they believe to be the founders of their particular tribe.* The Brazilian Indians of the Bakairi tribe, on the other hand, *draw* on the skins of their children black dots and circles so as to make them resemble the skin of the jaguar, which they believe was the founder of their tribe.** The course of development is perfectly clear: originally the savage *drew* certain signs on his skin, and later began to *cut* them into it. But why did he have to do this? As to the depiction of the supposed progenitor of the tribe, the answer which seems the most natural is the following: the desire to have this image drawn on, or incised into, his skin appeared in the savage under the influence of his devotion to his progenitor, or of the conviction that a mysterious connection existed between the latter and all his descendants. In other words, it is very natural to assume that the practice of tattooing arose as the product of a primitive *religious* feeling. If this hypothesis were correct, we should have to say that the hunting mode of life generated a hunting *mythology*, which, in turn, became the basis of one form of primitive ornamentation. This, of course, would not contradict the materialist view of history; on the contrary, it would be a vivid illustration of the thesis that there is a causal—though not always *direct*—connection between the development of art and the development of the productive forces. But this hypothesis, which appears so natural at a first glance, is not fully borne out by observation. The Red Indians of North America carve or draw the image of their imaginary progenitor on their weapons, their canoes, their huts and even their domestic utensils.*** Can it be assumed that

* J. G. Frazer, *Le Totémisme*, p. 43.

** P. Ehrenreich, "Mitteilungen über die zweite Xingu-Expedition in Brasilien," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1890, Vol. XXII.

*** Frazer, loc. cit., p. 45.

they do all this from religious motives? I do not think so. It is more probable that they are simply guided by the desire to mark the objects belonging to the members of their particular *gens*. But if this is so, then it is permissible to think that the Brazilian Indian mother, too, when she paints the skin of her child to make it look like that of the jaguar, does so merely from the desire to give a graphic indication of its *gentile affiliation*. This graphic indication of the gentile affiliation of the individual is already useful in his childhood—in the event of his being kidnapped, for example—but it becomes a positive necessity when he reaches adolescence. We know that primitive peoples have a complex system of regulations governing the reciprocal relations of the sexes. Violation of these regulations is severely punished, and to avoid possible error appropriate marks are made on the skins of persons on reaching sexual maturity. Children born of women who have no such marks are considered illegitimate and in some places are put to death.* Naturally, therefore, young people on reaching adolescence are anxious to be tattooed notwithstanding the painfulness of the operation.**

But this, of course, is not all. Through tattooing a savage not only indicates his gentile affiliation, but, it may be said, the whole story of his life. This is how Heckewelder describes the tattoos he saw on an old Red Indian

* J. S. Kubary, "Das Tätowieren in Mikronesien, speciell auf den Carolinen," in the book of Joest I have already quoted, *Tätowieren*, etc., p. 86.

** "The girls . . . are always anxious to have this ceremony performed." Eyre, op. cit., p. 343. On the Caroline Islands, "sobald das Mädchen Umgang mit Männern pflegt, trachtet sie, die unentbehrliche 'telengekel'—Tätowierung zu erwerben, weil ohne diese kein Mann sie ansehen würde." ["As soon as a girl reaches the age of intercourse with men, her thoughts are bent on obtaining the inevitable "telengekel" (tattooing), for without it no man would look at her."] Kubary, op. cit., p. 75.

warrior. "On his whole face, neck, shoulders, arms, thighs and legs, as well as on his breast and back, were represented scenes of the various actions and engagements he had been in; in short, the whole of his history was there deposited..."* And not only his own life. The tattoos also reflect the life of the whole society, at least, all its internal relations. I say nothing of the fact that the tattoos of the women differ from those of the men. Even the tattoos of the men are by no means alike: the rich seek to distinguish themselves from the poor, the slaveowners from the slaves. Little by little things come to a point when, by virtue of the *principle of antithesis*, the more highly placed persons *abandon the practice of tattooing* in order to stand out more conspicuously from the general crowd.** In a word, Jesuit Lafitau was perfectly right when he said that the various marks the North American Indians "*engraved*" on their bodies served them as "*records and memoire*."*** And if such "engraving" became a universal custom, it was because it was practically useful and even essential in primitive society. Originally, the savage perceived the value of tattooing, and then—much later—began to experience esthetic pleasure at the sight of a tattooed skin.

Thus, with Haberlandt,**** I emphatically reject the idea that the original purpose of tattooing was ornamentation. But I do not thereby answer the question as to what were the practical uses which induced the primitive hunter to practise it? I am firmly convinced that his need for "records and memoirs" was extremely influential in promoting the *spread and consolidation* of the custom of "engraving" signs on the skin. But the *origin* of this custom may

* Op. cit., p. 328.

** Cf. Joest, loc. cit., p. 27.

*** *Mœurs des sauvages américains*, Vol. I, p. 44.

**** Cf. the lecture cited above in *Mitteilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*.

have been due to other causes. Von den Steinen thinks that it sprang from the practice, still to be found among the medical men of primitive savage tribes, of *puncturing the skin to reduce inflammation*. In the remarkable book I have already quoted so often, *Unter den Naturvölkern Brasiliens*, he gives a picture showing a woman of the *Kataiju* tribe whose skin had been cicatrized for purely medical purposes. Nothing would be easier than to confuse these cicatrices with those the Brazilian Indians make for purposes of ornamentation. It is therefore quite possible that tattooing developed out of a primitive surgical practice, and only later began to play the role of a birth certificate, passport, "memoirs," etc. If this were so, it would be quite understandable why "engraving" of the skin is accompanied by religious rites: primitive doctors and surgeons are often at the same time magicians and wizards. But however that may be, it is clear that everything we know about tattooing only confirms the correctness of the general rule I have formulated, namely, that approach to objects from the *utilitarian* standpoint was anterior to the approach to them from the *esthetic* standpoint.

We see the same thing in other branches of primitive ornamentation. The hunter originally killed birds, as all other game, in order to feed on their flesh. Those parts of the slain animals—the feathers of birds, the skin, spines, teeth and claws of beasts, etc.,—which could not be consumed or used for the satisfaction of other requirements, might nevertheless serve as a proof and token of his strength, courage or skill. He therefore began to cover his body with *skins*, to affix *horns* to his head, to hang *claws* and *teeth* around his neck, and even to *insert feathers* in his lips, his ears or his septum. Besides the desire to boast of his prowess, the insertion of the feathers must have been motivated also by another "factor," namely, the urge to demonstrate his ability to stand physical pain,

which is of course a very valuable quality in a hunter who is a warrior to boot. "Wearing his kleinode (treasure) in the hole punctured in his nose, lip or ear," von den Steinen rightly remarks, "the young man must have felt a much greater stalwart than if it had simply hung from his body by a string."* Thus the custom of piercing the nose and ears gradually developed and took firm root, and failure to observe this custom must have unpleasantly affected the *esthetic sense* of the primitive hunters. How far this assumption is correct, is shown by the following. As I have already said, civilized people in their dances often wear masks intended to represent animals. Von den Steinen** found among the Brazilian Indians many masks depicting birds and even fish. But note that the Brazilian Indian, when reproducing the features of a dove, say, does not omit to insert a *feather* into its beak: the meek bird, presumably, seems to him more beautiful when wearing this hunting trophy.

When the sight of a hunting trophy begins to excite pleasurable feelings apart from any *conscious* thought of the strength or skill of the hunter it adorns, it becomes an object of esthetic enjoyment, and then its colour and form acquire great and independent significance. The North American Indians sometimes made very beautiful headdresses of gaily coloured birds' feathers.*** The red feathers of a certain Polynesian bird used to be one of the major items of trade in the Friendly Islands.**** Many similar examples might be given, but they must all

* Von den Steinen, op. cit., p. 179.

** Ibid., p. 305.

*** Schoolcraft, loc. cit., Vol. III, p. 67. I already said in my first letter that the favourite adornment of the Indians of North-west America is the claws of the grizzly bear. This fact well shows that the primitive hunting ornaments serve as a sign of "skill" in the chase, just as the scalp is evidence of military prowess

**** Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, Vol. II, p. 141

be regarded as deriving from the fundamental conditions of the hunting mode of life.

For the very natural reason that hunting is not a female occupation, trophies of the chase are never worn by women. But the custom of wearing trophies of the chase in the ears, lips or the septum of the nose led at a very early stage to the practice of inserting in these parts of the body bones, pieces of wood or even stones. It was from this type of ornament, presumably, that the Brazilian *botoque* arose. As this new type of ornament was not necessarily associated with an exclusively male occupation—hunting—there was nothing to prevent it being worn by women. More, it is very probable that they were first introduced by women. In Africa, every woman of the *Bongo* tribe, on marrying, pierces her lower lip and inserts a piece of wood into it. Some, in addition, wear straws in holes punctured in their nostrils.* This custom most likely arose at a time when the working of metals was still unknown, and when women, desirous of imitating the men but not being entitled to adorn themselves with trophies of war or the chase, were still unfamiliar with metallic ornaments. The working of metals ushered in a new period in the history of ornamentation. Metallic ornaments gradually began to oust ornaments obtained from the chase.** Men and women began to cover their limbs and neck with metal bangles. The feathers, sticks and straws which used to be inserted into lips, nose or ears were replaced by rings and pendants made of metal. Belles of the *Bongo* tribe not infrequently wear iron nose-rings resembling those Europeans put on

* Schweinfurth, loc. cit., Vol. I, pp. 283-84.

** These ornaments, however, are very tenacious and we find them in the ancient civilizations of the East worn in the costumes of priests and monarchs. The Assyrian kings, for instance, wore crowns decked with feathers, while some of the Egyptian priests, when performing religious rites, decked themselves in tiger skins.

ferocious bulls.* Similar rings are worn by many women in Senegambia.** As to iron ear-rings, women of the Bongo tribe wear them almost by the dozen, for this purpose piercing in several places not only the lobe of the ear but also the helix. "One meets lady fops," Schweinfurth says, "whose bodies are decked in this way in a hundred places. There is not a protuberance of the body or a fold of the skin in which holes have not been punctured for this purpose."*** But from the nose-ring it is not such a far cry to the ring through the upper lip, that is, the *pelele*, to which I referred in my first letter. When the old Makololo chief told David and Charles Livingstone that the women of his tribe wear the *pelele* for *beauty's sake*, he was quite right, but he could not, of course, explain *how* a ring inserted through the upper lip came to be regarded by his fellow-tribesmen as an ornament. Actually, this was due to tastes inherited from the hunting period proper and modified in correspondence to the new state of the productive forces.

The state of the productive forces, in my opinion, also explains the fact that in this new period the men no longer prevent the women from wearing the same ornaments as they have begun to wear themselves.**** The feather

* Schweinfurth, loc. cit., Vol. I, p. 284. It is noteworthy that the wearing of iron nose-rings is left to the discretion of the dark-skinned ladies of fashion, but the carrying of the wooden stick in the lower lip is compulsory for all women of the Bongo tribe. It is apparent from this alone that the latter custom is more ancient than the former.

** Béranger-Féraud, *Les peuplades de la Sénégambie*, Paris, 1879, p. 187.

*** Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 284.

**** Whereas in the Makololo tribe the *pelele* was specifically a female ornament, on the River Rovuma the Livingstones saw it also worn by men (*Explorations du Zambéze*, Paris, 1866, pp. 109-10). This indicates that the Makololo chief was mistaken when he thought that the *pelele* served the women in place of a beard. Similarly, the ring through the septum is by no means everywhere

inserted in the nose or the ear lobe was evidence of skill in the chase, and it would have been unpleasant to the men to see it worn by women, who never engaged in hunting. Metal ornaments, on the other hand, testify not to skill, but to *wealth*, and the rich owner would from sheer vanity strive to have as many of these ornaments as possible worn by his women, who by that time—in some places, at least—were becoming *more and more* his property. “I believe,” Stanley says, “that Chumbiri (an African chief), as soon as he obtained any brass wire, melted it and forged it into brass collars for his wives. I made a rough calculation, and I estimated that his wives bore about their necks until death at least 800 lbs. of brass; his daughters—he had six—120 lbs.; his favourite female slaves about 200 lbs. Add 6 lbs. of brass wire to each wife and daughter for arm and leg ornaments, and one is astonished to discover that Chumbiri possesses a portable store of 1,396 lbs. of brass.”*

worn by the women alone: “Thus, for example, in some parts of Upper Nigeria the inhabitants (of both sexes)—Sarakole, Bambara—often wear metal rings driven through the septum” (Béranger-Féraud, *op. cit.*, p. 384). This fondness for metallic ornaments sometimes has rather unexpected consequences. Among the Herero tribe in Africa the rich folk cover their legs with circlets made of brass wire, and “fashion demands that the wearer shall in walking bend from side to side, as if he were lifting his legs with difficulty” (Elisée Reclus, *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, Vol. XIII, p. 664).

* *A travers le continent mystérieux*, Paris, 1879, Vol. II, p. 321. The enslavement of women reacts on the growth of population. With the Makololo, “the wealthy old men, who have plenty of cattle, marry all the pretty young girls.... The young men of the tribe who happen to have no cattle, must get on without a wife, or be content with one who has few personal charms. This state of affairs probably leads to a great deal of immorality, and children are few.” (David and Charles Livingstone, *loc. cit.*, pp. 262-63.) The German author was right who said that abstract laws of population exist for animals and plants only.¹⁴ But it is to be believed that this correct view of his will, like so many others, be thrown overboard by the gentlemen who have made it their praiseworthy

Thus female ornaments developed and changed under the influence of several "factors," but, mark, all the latter either arose as a result of the particular state of the productive forces of primitive society (the enslavement of woman by man being one such "factor"); or, being a permanent feature of human nature, they operated in the particular way they did, and in no other, owing to the direct influence of the "economy"—such, for example, was the vanity which induced men to take pride in the rich attire of their womenfolk; such, too, were other and similar properties of the human character.

That love of metallic ornaments could have arisen only after man had learned the art of metal-working, needs no demonstration. That his habit of adorning himself and his wives and female slaves with metal ornaments sprang from a desire to boast of his wealth, is also very clear and, if need be, could be demonstrated by many examples. But do not think that it is impossible to point to other motives that might have induced the wearing of such ornaments. On the contrary, it is very probable that they (metal rings around the arms and legs, for instance) were originally worn because they had certain practical uses; that later they were worn not only for their practical uses, but from the desire of the owner to boast of his wealth, while, *parallel with this*, men's tastes gradually evolved until a limb adorned with metal rings began to seem beautiful.

The approach to objects from the standpoint of *use* was anterior to the approach to them from the standpoint of *esthetic pleasure*.

You may perhaps ask, what practical uses could there have been in the wearing of metal rings? I shall not un-

task to "revise" his theories. The "revision" consists in these theories being discarded one after another and replaced by the theories of bourgeois economists. The "revising" gentlemen "progress" by moving backward.

dertake to enumerate them all, but shall point to only a few.

First, we already know what a big role *rhythm* plays in primitive dances. Measured stamping of the feet and clapping of the hands serve to mark the time of the dance. But this is not enough for the primitive dancers. Often, for the same purpose, they suspend from their bodies regular garlands of rattling objects. Sometimes—with the Kaffirs of the *Basuto* tribe, for instance—these rattles consist merely of bags made of dried hide and filled with pebbles.* Their replacement by *metal* rattles would obviously be a great advantage. Iron rings on the legs and arms might well serve as metal rattles. And we do indeed find that the Basuto Kaffirs readily put on such rings for the dance.** But metal rings, when striking one against the other, emit a jingling sound not only when the wearer dances, but also when he is walking. Women of the Niam-Niam tribe wear so many rings on their legs that the sound they make in walking can be heard from afar.*** By keeping time with the step, this sound facilitates walking, and it may have been one of the motives for the use of the rings: it is known that Negro carriers in Africa sometimes hang little bells to their loads, which stimulate them by the measured jingling sound they constantly emit.**** The measured sound of the metal rings

* E. Casalis, *Les Bassoutos*, Paris, 1859, p. 158.

Among the Indians of Guiana the dance leaders sometimes carry hollow bamboo staves filled with stones which they strike on the ground at regular intervals, the sound emitted regulating the movements of the dancers. R. H. Schomburgk, *Reisen in Guiana und am Orinoko*, Leipzig, 1841, p. 108.

** Casalis, *ibid.*, p. 158. Probably, the glitter of the rings is also of significance, by lending a bright display to the movements of the dancers.

*** Colonel C. Chaille-Long, *L'Afrique Centrale, Expéditions*, Paris, 1882, p. 282.

**** Burton, *op. cit.*, p. 620.

must also have facilitated many types of female labour, the grinding of corn on handmills, for exemple.* This also, probably, was one of the original reasons for wearing them.

Secondly, the custom of wearing rings on the legs and arms was anterior to the use of metal ornaments. The Hottentots used to make such rings of ivory.** Other primitive peoples made them of hippopotamus hide. This custom is still preserved by the *Dinkas*, although, as we know from the first letter, this tribe, to borrow the words of Schweinfurth, is already passing through a regular iron age. Originally, these rings may have been used with the practical purpose of protecting the naked limbs from thorny plants.***

When the working of metals began and took firm hold, rings of hide and bone were gradually replaced by metal rings. Since these latter came to be a sign of affluence, it is not surprising that rings of bone and hide began to be regarded as less refined ornaments.**** And these less *refined* ornaments also began to seem less *beautiful*; their appearance excited less pleasure than that of metal rings, irrespective of utilitarian considerations. Hence, here too the practically *useful* was anterior to the esthetically *pleasant*.

* Casalis, loc. cit., p. 150. I have already referred to this in my first letter, although in another connection.

** Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, Vol. I, p. 91.

*** Note that the reference here is not to rings worn on the fingers, but to arm and leg bracelets. I know that "leg bracelets" is a truly barbarous term, but I cannot at the moment think of another.

**** See Schweinfurth, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 150-51. The wearing of circlets made of palm-fibre is very widespread among the Wakonju tribe. But the distinguished members of the tribe are already replacing circlets of palm-fibre by metal rings, which no doubt are now considered more beautiful (see Stanley, *Dans les ténèbres de l'Afrique*, Vol. II, p. 262).

Lastly, by covering the limbs—and especially the arms—of the warrior, the iron rings protected them in battle from the blows of the enemy, and were therefore useful to the warrior. In Africa, the warriors of the *Bongo* tribe wear iron circlets covering both arms from the wrist to the elbow. This ornamentation, known as *danga-bor*, may be regarded as the first beginnings of steel armour.*

We therefore see that if certain metallic objects were gradually transformed from *useful* articles into such whose appearance excited *esthetic pleasure*, this was due to the operation of the most diverse “factors,” but that here, as in all the instances I have examined, some of the factors were themselves a result of the development of the productive forces, while others could operate in this way, and in no other, precisely because the productive forces were at the given, and not any other, stage of development.

In 1885, Inama-Sternegg delivered a lecture before the Vienna Anthropological Society on “*the politico-economic ideas of primitive peoples*,” in which he posed, among others, the following question: “Are they (the primitive peoples) fond of the objects they use as ornaments because they have a definite value, or do these objects acquire a definite value solely because they serve as ornaments?*** The lecturer did not venture to give a categorical answer to this question. And it would indeed have been hard to do so, since the question was wrongly formulated. It must first be stated *what value* is meant: use-value or exchange-value. If use-value is meant, then it may be said quite confidently that the objects which serve primitive peoples as ornaments were first *considered useful*, or *were a sign that their owner possessed*

* See the description given by Schweinfurth, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 271.

** *Mitteilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, Vol. XV.

qualities useful to the tribe, and only later began to appear beautiful. Use-value is anterior to *esthetic* value. But once the given objects have acquired a definite *esthetic* value in the eyes of primitive man, he strives to obtain them on account of this value alone, forgetting, or never even thinking of its genesis. When exchange among different tribes begins, objects of adornment become one of the chief articles of exchange, and then the ability of a thing to serve as an ornament is sometimes (but not always) the only *psychological* motive that induces the buyer to acquire it. As to *exchange-value*, we know that it is an *historical category*, which develops very slowly, and of which the primitive hunting tribes—for very understandable reasons—have only the vaguest notion, and therefore the quantitative ratio in which one article was exchanged for another was originally for the most part fortuitous.

If the state of the productive forces at the command of a primitive people determines the ornaments peculiar to that people, then the character of the ornaments used by any tribe should be an indication of the state of its productive forces.

This is in fact the case. Here is an example.

The Niam-Niam Negroes have the greatest preference for ornaments made of the teeth of men and animals. They prize lion's teeth exceedingly, but the demand for these teeth apparently exceeds the supply, and the Niam-Niams therefore use *imitation* lion's teeth made of ivory. Schweinfurth says that a necklet fashioned of such artificial teeth is very effective against a dark skin. But you, sir, will realize that the chief consideration here is not the colour contrast, but the fact that the pieces of ivory which stand out so handsomely against the dark skin represent *lion's* teeth. And if anyone were to ask what mode of life the Niam-Niam Negroes lead, you would answer quite confidently. Without any difficulty or a moment's hesitation, you would say that they live by hunting.

And you would be right. The men of this tribe *are essentially hunters*, who do not even deny themselves the pleasure of tasting human flesh. They are not unfamiliar with tillage, but they leave it to the care of the women.*

But, as we know, these same Niam-Niams also wear metal ornaments. This is a big step forward compared with those hunting tribes, like the Australians or Brazilian Bakairi, to whom metal ornaments are unknown. But what does this forward step in ornamentation imply? It implies that a step forward was previously made by the productive forces.

Another example. The dandy of the Fan tribe decks his hair with the brightest-coloured feathers, dyes his teeth black (the principle of antithesis: contrast to animals, whose teeth are always white), throws the skin of a leopard or some other wild beast across his shoulders, and suspends a big knife to his belt. The female dandy of the same tribe goes about naked, but her arms are adorned with copper bracelets, and her hair with a multitude of white beads.**

Is there a causal connection between these ornaments and the productive forces at the disposal of the Fan tribe? Not only is there such a connection; it veritably strikes the eye. The male attire of this tribe is a typical *hunter's attire*. The female ornaments—beads and bracelets—have no direct connection with hunting, but they are secured in exchange for one of the most valuable products of the chase—ivory. The men do not allow the women to adorn themselves with trophies of the chase, but in exchange for products they derive from the chase they procure for their women ornaments made by tribes (or peoples) whose productive forces are at a higher level of development. It is this higher level of development of the pro-

* Cf. Schweinfurth, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 5, 7, 9, 15, 16.

** Cf. Du Chaillu, *Voyages et aventures dans l'Afrique équatoriale*, p. 163.

ductive forces that determines the esthetic tastes of their better halves.*

A third example. The inhabitants of the island of *Ubwari* on Lake *Tanganyika*, Africa, wear a kind of cloak which is made of bark and dyed to resemble as nearly as possible the skin of a leopard. Metal bracelets, which are used by all the neighbouring tribes, are here worn only by the wives of rich men; the poorer women have to content themselves with bracelets of bark. Lastly, instead of the metal wire which the neighbouring tribes use to stiffen their coiffures, the inhabitants of this island make do with *grass*. How does all this accord with the productive forces of the inhabitants of *Ubwari*? Why do they dye their cloaks to resemble the leopard's skin? Because there are no leopards on their island, yet they consider the hide of this beast the finest adornment of a warrior. Consequently, peculiarities of geographical environment led to a change in the material from which the cloaks are made, but they could not change the esthetic tastes which determine the manner in which the material is fashioned.** Other peculiarities of the geographical environment—lack of metal deposits on the island—retarded the spread of metal ornaments among the inhabitants of *Ubwari*, but could not prevent them from conceiving a fondness for such ornaments: they are already worn there by the wives of the rich. Owing to the foresaid peculiarities of the geographical environment, the process is slower here than in other places, but both here and there

* Since in primitive society the men set great store on hunting and war trophies, they are often more conservative in their adornment than the women, who "*have nothing to lose.*"

** A not uninteresting question: are these tastes borrowed from ancestors who lived in places which were frequented by wild beasts, or have the inhabitants of *Ubwari* succumbed in this instance to the influence of neighbours who still engage in hunting? I do not know which of these assumptions is correct, but I do know that neither contradicts what I say.

the development of esthetic tastes goes hand in hand with the development of the productive forces, and therefore, both here and there the former is a sure indication of the state of the latter.

I have said time and again that even in primitive hunting societies esthetic tastes are not always determined by technology and economics directly. Not infrequently, rather numerous and diversified intermediate "factors" exert their influence. But even an indirect causal connection is still a causal connection. If *A* in one instance engenders *C* directly, and, in another, does so through *B* which it has itself engendered previously, can it be said that *C* does not owe its origin to *A*? If a given custom, say, sprang from a superstition, or from vanity, or from the desire to terrify enemies, this does not provide the ultimate explanation of the origin of the custom. We still have to ask whether the superstition from which it sprang was not characteristic of the *given* mode of life—the *hunting mode*, for example—and whether the way in which man satisfied his vanity or terrified his enemies was not determined by the productive forces of society and its economy.


We have only to ask this question, and the irrefutable logic of facts compels us to answer it in the affirmative.

The designs with which primitive man adorns his weapons, implements of labour and...¹⁵



SIXTH LETTER



ave you ever had occasion, sir, to see illustrations of the combs used, for example, by the Indians of Central Brazil or the Papuans of New Guinea? They consist simply of several sticks tied together. This, so to speak, is the first stage in the development of the comb. In a further stage of its evolution, it is made of an entire piece of board in which teeth are cut. Such combs are used, for example, by the Monbuttu Negroes and the Borotse Kaffirs. At this stage of its development, the comb is sometimes ornamented with great diligence. But the most characteristic part of the ornamentation is a design inscribed on the board consisting of intersecting rows of parallel lines. They are obviously intended to represent the thongs which originally bound together the sticks of which the comb was made. Here the *ornamentation* is a picture of what formerly served for a *utilitarian* purpose. The approach to the object from the standpoint of *use* was anterior to the approach to it from the standpoint of *esthetic pleasure*.

What we see in the case of the comb is also to be seen in very many other instances. You, of course, know, sir,

that primitive man made his weapons and tools of *stone*. You also probably know that originally the stone axe had no *handle*. Prehistoric archaeology shows very convincingly that the handle was a rather complicated and difficult thing for primitive man to invent, and appeared at a comparatively late stage of the Quaternary Period.* Originally, the handle was attached more or less securely to the axe-head with thongs. Later the thongs become superfluous, man having learned to affix the handle to the head quite firmly without them. They then fell into disuse, but in the place they had occupied there appeared a depiction of them, consisting of intersecting rows of parallel lines, serving as *an ornament*.** The same thing occurred with other tools the parts of which were originally tied together and were then joined by other means. They, too, were ornamented with depictions of the thongs that had once been necessary. Thus arose the "*geometrical*" designs which hold such a distinguished place in primitive ornamentation, and which may already be observed on implements of the Quaternary Period.*** Further development of the productive forces imparted a new impetus to the development of this type of ornamentation. In this, the art of pottery was particularly instrumental. We know that this art was preceded by basket-weaving, or *plaiting*. The Australians are unable to this day to make utensils of clay, and use plaited utensils instead. When clay articles appeared, they were given the shape and form of the plaited utensils formerly in general use, and on their outer surfaces were depicted rows of parallel lines similar to those to which I have already alluded in the

* See G. de Mortillet, *Le Préhistorique*, Paris, 1883, p. 257.

** Such ornaments may be seen on the Polynesian axes depicted in Hjalmar Stolpe's book, *Entwicklungserscheinungen in der Ornamentik der Naturvölker*, Vienna, 1892, pp. 29-30.

*** G. de Mortillet, loc. cit., p. 415.

case of the comb. This manner of ornamenting clay utensils, which came into being with the first beginnings of the art of pottery, is still very prevalent even among the most civilized peoples. It also borrowed many motifs from the art of textile-weaving.

The fruits of certain plants—the *pumpkin*, for instance—were, and still are, used by primitive man as utensils. Thongs made of leather or fibre were tied around them for convenience of carrying.

When man learned the art of working metals, *curved* lines, sometimes of very intricate design, began to appear on the clay vessels side by side with *straight* lines. In a word, here the development of ornamentation was most closely and distinctly linked with the development of primitive technology or, in other words, with the development of the productive forces.

Needless to say, ornamentation with geometrical or textile patterns is not confined to clay utensils; it is applied to wooden and even leather articles.* Generally speaking, once such a design has arisen, it soon acquires very wide application.

*In his lecture before the Berlin Anthropological Society on the second expedition to the Xinga River, Ehrenreich says that in the ornaments of the natives "all designs which have the appearance of geometrical figures are actually abbreviated, sometimes even stylized representations of quite definite objects, mostly animals."** Thus, a wavy line with dots on either side represents a snake, a rhomboidal figure with darkened angles, a fish, while an isosceles triangle is, so to speak, a depiction of the national costume of the Brazilian Indian female, which, as we know, consists of nothing but a variant of the cele-*

* See the picture of an Algerian camel-hide bottle on p. XVIII of R. Allier's introduction to Christol's *Au sud de l'Afrique*.

** *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vol. XXII, p. 89.

braled "fig leaf."* The same is true of Central America. Holmes has shown that the geometrical figures with which the Indians of those parts cover their utensils are representations of the coats of animals. A clay vessel from Senegambia preserved in the *Maison des Missions in Paris* is ornamented with the depiction of a snake, and it is easy to see from this depiction how drawings of the coats of animals may become transformed into geometrical figures.** Lastly, should you ever have occasion to look through Hjalmar Stolpe's *Entwicklungserscheinungen in der Ornamentik der Naturvölker* (Vienna, 1892), examine very carefully pages 37-44, and you will see some remarkable illustrations of the gradual development of purely geometrical figures from figures representing human beings.***

* This variant of the fig leaf is called the *uluri*. When von den Steinen drew an isosceles triangle for the benefit of Indians of the Bakairi tribe, they laughed and exclaimed: "Uluril" Von den Steinen drily remarks: "Der Lehrer der Geometrie braucht heute gewiss nicht mehr an einem Uluri besonders Vergnügen zu haben, damit er einen Dreieck konzipieren könne. Das Uluri ist so eine Art Archeopteryx der Mathematik." ["Nowadays a geometry teacher need not find particular pleasure in an uluri to be able to draw a triangle. The uluri is so to speak an archeopteryx of mathematics."] *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens*, p. 270.

** See p. XXI of R. Allier's introduction which I have already cited. Pointing out that the very simple ornamental designs dating back to the close of the Quaternary Period consist of "straight lines" in various combinations, Mortillet observes that "these extremely simple designs are followed by a series of wavy lines and other products of the fancy" (*Le Préhistorique*, p. 415). After what has been said above, we have good reason to doubt whether these really are products of the fancy. The wavy lines of the Quaternary Period probably represented very much what they represent today with the Brazilian Indians.

*** According to Stolpe, in the ornamental designs of primitive peoples very often, "rein lineare Ornamente von Menschen- oder Tierfiguren hergeleitet sind. Die Pflanzenwelt (he adds) scheint merkwürdigerweise bei den exotischen Naturvölkern ein viel geringeres Material zur Stilisierung geliefert zu haben" ["purely linear

It may be said that the ornamental designs of the Australians have not been studied at all. But in view of what we know of those of other peoples, we have every reason to assume that the rows of lines which decorate their shields likewise represent the coats of animals.*

In some cases, however, the lines with which the Australians adorn their weapons have another significance; they represent *geographical charts*.**

This may seem strange and even incredible, but I would remind you that such charts are also drawn by the Yukagirs of Siberia.***

People who live by hunting and lead a nomadic existence experience a far greater necessity for such charts than did our peasant tillers of the good old days, who often enough passed their whole life without once traveling beyond the boundaries of their rural district. And necessity is a good teacher. It taught the primitive hunter to make charts, and it also taught him other arts which are entirely unknown to our peasant tiller: *painting and sculpture*. In fact, the primitive hunter is nearly always, in his own way, a skilful and sometimes passionate painter and sculptor. Von den Steinen says that it was a favourite evening pastime with the natives who accompanied him on his travels to trace in the sand the figures of animals and scenes from the chase.**** The Australians are not inferior to the Brazilian Indians in this respect. They eagerly trace drawings with the knife on the kangaroo hides which serve them as protection

designs are derived from the figures of men and animals. The vegetable world, remarkably enough, provides primitive peoples with far less material for stylization" (p. 23)]. We already know to what a degree this truly remarkable phenomenon is connected with the development of the productive forces of primitive society.

* See Grosse, *Anfänge der Kunst*, pp. 118-19.

** Ibid., p. 120.

*** See V. I. Jochelson, *On the Rivers Yasachnaya and Korkodon*.

**** Loc. cit., p. 249.

against the cold, or on the bark of trees. Philipp saw near Port Jackson drawings of weapons, shields, men, birds, fish, lizards, etc. These drawings were cut in the face of rocks, and some of them testified to a fairly high artistic skill on the part of the primitive artists.* On the north-west coast of Australia, Grey came across designs carved on rocks and trees representing human arms, legs, etc. These designs were poorly executed. But in the upper reaches of the Glenelg he discovered several caves whose walls were covered with far more competent drawings.** Some investigators think that these drawings were not made by Australians, but by one of the Malaysians who sometimes come to these parts to trade. But, firstly, it is impossible to adduce any positive proof in support of this opinion.*** And, secondly, it is not important for us here to know who did decorate the Glenelg caves. It is sufficient for us to be certain that the Australians are fond of making similar—if perhaps cruder—drawings. And on this point there can be no doubt whatever.

The same thing is to be observed with the Bushmen. They have long been celebrated for their drawings and bas-reliefs. Fritsch saw many thousands of figures of animals traced on some rocks near Hopetown. Hutchinson found many drawings on the walls of caves inhabited by Bushmen. Hübner saw in the Transvaal hundreds of figures which had been carved by Bushmen in soft shale.**** Sometimes the Bushmen's drawings depict separate animals, sometimes whole scenes, such as a hippopotamus or elephant hunt, shooting with bow and arrow, clashes

* Waitz-Gerland, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, Part 6. Leipzig, 1872, p. 759.

** Ibid., pp. 760, 761, 762. See reproductions of these pictures in Grosse, *Anfänge der Kunst*, pp. 159 et seq.

*** For the arguments against it, see Grosse, op. cit., pp. 162 et seq.

**** Grosse, loc. cit., p. 173.

with enemies.* Particularly, and deservedly, celebrated is the wall painting ("*fresco*") found in a cave near Hermon, depicting Bushmen raiding the cattle of Matabele Kaffirs.** As far as I am aware, nobody has expressed any doubt concerning the origin of this fresco; everybody admits that it was made by Bushmen. It would indeed be difficult to doubt this, as all the Bushmen's dark-skinned neighbours are very poor artists. But the unquestionable and generally recognized artistic ability of the Bushmen is fresh proof that the drawings found by Grey in the caves on the Glenelg are the work of Australian artists: for in respect to culture, the Australians and the Bushmen are practically on the same level.

The hunters and fishers of the Arctic regions likewise display a great inclination for the plastic arts. The Eskimos and Chukchis adorn their weapons and implements with figures of birds and beasts which are distinguished by close fidelity to nature. But not content with this, they sometimes depict whole scenes, exclusively borrowed, of course, from the only mode of life with which they are familiar, that of hunters and fishers.*** The carvings of the Eskimos are truly remarkable.**** In this they have no equal among existing tribes. Only the tribes that inhabited Western Europe towards the close of the Quaternary Period might be named as worthy competitors.

These tribes, who knew neither cattle-breeding nor agriculture, have left numerous relics of their art in the shape of engraved or carved objects. Like the hunting tribes of today, they borrowed the motifs for their artistic work almost exclusively from the animal world. Mortillet knows only two instances where plants are repre-

* See the reproductions of these drawings in F. Christol's *Au sud de l'Afrique*, pp. 143, 145, 147.

** See the reproduction in Christol, loc. cit., pp. 152-53.

*** Lubbock, *Les origines de la civilisation*, Paris 1887, p. 38.

**** See illustration in Grosse, *Anfänge der Kunst*, pp. 180, 181, 182.

sented. Of the animals, they chiefly depicted mammals, and of the mammals, mostly the reindeer (which was then to be met with all over Western Europe) and the horse, which was still untamed; then follow the bison, wild goat, deer, antelope, mammoth, boar, fox, wolf, bear, lynx, marten, rabbit, etc.—in brief, as Mortillet says, all the mammalian fauna of the time. . . .¹⁶ . . . the question naturally arises, in which of the subsequent phases of its development, in what historical circumstances, and for what reasons, did art first become idealistic? This question is still very inadequately elucidated by science. I shall revert to it in one of my next letters.

I have said that it was necessity that taught the primitive hunter the arts of painting and sculpture. Let us see what pedagogical methods it used.

In order to communicate or exchange their thoughts, the North American Indians often and readily resort to what Schoolcraft calls *picture-writing*. The thoughts expressed in this manner usually relate to hunting, war and various other relations of life. Hence, their *picture-writing* primarily serves practical, *utilitarian* purposes. Such, too, are the purposes served by the similar form of writing of the Australians. "Austin found on the rocks around a spring in the interior of the Australian continent pictures of kangaroo legs and human arms, made with the obvious purpose of indicating that men and animals came to drink at this spring."* The above-mentioned figures which Grey saw on the northwest coast of Australia, depicting various parts of the human body (arms, legs, etc.), were also probably drawn with the utilitarian purpose of communicating information to absent comrades. Von den Steinen relates that he once saw on the bank of a

* Waitz-Gerland, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, Vol. VI, p. 760. Depictions of human arms are also to be found in art relics of the Quaternary Period (Mortillet, op. cit., pp. 365, 473-74). They too were probably picture-writings.

Brazilian river a picture which the natives had drawn in the sand, representing one of the local breeds of fish. He ordered the Indians who accompanied him to cast a net, and they pulled out several fish of the breed depicted in the sand.* Obviously, the drawing was made by the natives in order to inform their comrades that such-and-such fish were to be found at the given spot. But this, of course, was not the only case in which the natives felt the need for picture-writing. There was often such a need, and the natives must have resorted to picture-writing constantly, and it therefore must have been one of the earliest products of their hunting mode of life. "It seems to me," V. I. Jochelson rightly remarks, "that the elements of written and oral expression of thoughts and sentiments . . .¹⁷ may have arisen simultaneously. We see the germs of writing even in the animal world. The trail leads the wolf to the deer. The latter by its hoofprints intimates to the former where it has passed and in which direction. What the animals wrote with their hoofs was of the greatest importance in the life of the primitive hunter, and the trail may have been the prototype of writing. With such a hunting tribe as the Yukagirs, the significance of the 'trail' is reflected in their language. In Yukagiri, every verb has three declensions. One of them, which I call the *evidential*, expresses an action the performance of which is inferred from its traces; for example, if you have learned from tracks in the forest that such-and-such a person had been there, and on returning home want to impart the fact to your household, you would say: it is evident from the tracks that so and so was in the forest. But in Yukagiri you would say this in one word, which is distinguished from the ordinary verbal form 'was' only by the addition of the suffix *jäl*, so we see that even language forms are dependent on the 'trail.' Thus the trail may have served as the model for the conscious use of

* *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens*, p. 248.

signs by people when communicating with one another at a distance. But originally these signs were a simple depiction of the object or concept they expressed, and the exactness of the depiction was closely associated with art.* Consequently, in primitive hunting society writing and painting were one and the same, and the hunting mode of life must naturally and necessarily have excited, developed and encouraged the instincts and talents of the primitive artists.** Such in fact was the case. . . .

(...) this talent was of course used not only in the direct struggle for existence. The Yukagirs resort to writing even in courtship.*** This is a luxury which is still inaccessible to the majority of our peasants, but it is a simple and natural consequence of the hunting mode of life. Just as simple and natural a consequence of this mode of life is the fact that primitive man adorns with the figures of animals his weapons and tools and even his own body.**** As these pictures become *stylized*, they grow more

* V. I. Jochelson, loc. cit., pp. 33-34. See also pp. 34-35, where it may be seen how important such writing was for the Yukagirs in their wanderings: they had to be able to write under penalty of failing in the chase.

** A fine capacity for drawing is usually displayed by children of Australians who attend European schools. This, Semon observes, is not surprising: "Denn auch die Alten sind Meister im Lesen aller der Zeichen, die das Wild auf flüchtiger Spur dem Boden, den Gräsern und Bäumen aufgedrückt hat. Ebenso geschickt sind sie aber auch, sich gegenseitig durch absichtlich hervorgebrachte Zeichen zu verständigen. . . . Es gibt Stämme, die darin geradezu Bewunderungswürdiges leisten." ["For the adults too are pastmasters in reading all the tracks that the running beasts leave on the ground, the grass and the trees. But they are equally skilled in understanding one another through signs made deliberately. Some tribes perform miracles in this respect."] *Im australischen Busche*, p. 242.

*** Jochelson, op. cit., p. 34.

**** In New Zealand, tattooing is called *moko*, which means *lizard*, or *snake* (Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, Vol. II, p. 137.) It is obvious that

and more remote from their original form, and often they rejoice the idealist investigator by their completely abstract character. That a close causal connection exists between primitive ornamental designs and the conditions of the hunting mode of life was elucidated only very recently, but these designs must now be ranked among the most convincing evidences in favour of the materialist view of history.

As von den Steinen very aptly observes, the word *zeichnen* in the German language reveals a clear connection with the origin of the art of drawing in primitive society. It obviously derives from the word *Zeichen*—a sign. Von den Steinen thinks that the *making of signs* as a means of communication is older than *drawing*. I fully agree with him, because—as you already know—I am generally convinced that the approach to objects (and, of course, to actions) from the standpoint of utility was anterior to the approach to them from the standpoint of esthetic pleasure. Von den Steinen adds: “The pleasure afforded by imitative representation, which determined the whole subsequent development of graphic art, was to some degree an operating cause from the very beginning.”* We shall see in one of our next letters whether it is true that the “whole” *subsequent development* of painting was determined by the pleasure afforded by imitative representation. But it is self-evident that if imitation afforded no pleasure, painting would never have emerged from the stage of the *making of signs* for the purpose of *communicating information*. Pleasure was unquestionably an indispensable element. The whole question is, *why* was

the tattooing was originally confined to pictures of these animals. Their stylized representations were probably the basis of the “geometrical” patterns with which the New Zealanders later began to adorn their bodies.

* Loc. cit., p. 244.

the pleasure afforded by imitative representation felt so strongly by the European hunters of the Quaternary Period, by the Australians and Bushmen, by the Eskimos and Yukagirs, and developed in them a powerful urge for painting, and why is it so little in evidence, for example, among those African Negroes with whom agriculture is a long-standing pursuit? And this question can be answered satisfactorily only by pointing to the different productive pursuits of the hunting peoples on the one hand, and the agricultural peoples on the other. We have already seen how greatly important picture-writing is in the life of the primitive hunters. It arose as a condition of success in their struggle for existence. But once it had arisen, it must necessarily have guided in a definite direction the tendency to imitation which is rooted in human nature, but which develops in one way or another depending on the conditions by which man is surrounded. As long as primitive man remains a hunter, his tendency to imitation makes him, among other things, a painter and sculptor. The reason is evident. What does he need *as a painter*? Power of observation and deftness of hand. These are precisely the qualities which he *also* needs *as a hunter*. His artistic activity is therefore a manifestation of the very qualities which are evolved in him by the struggle for existence. When, with the transition to cattle-herding and agriculture, the conditions of his struggle for existence change, primitive man in large degree loses the tendency and ability for painting which distinguished him in the hunting period. "Although," Grosse says, "the tillers and cattle-herders are at a much higher cultural level than the hunter, they are far inferior to him in the graphic arts, from which, incidentally, it may be seen that the relation between art and culture is not as simple as some philosophers think." And Grosse himself explains the reason for this artistic backwardness—which, at a first glance,

seems so strange—of the pastoral and agricultural peoples. “Neither the tillers, nor the herders,” he says “need power of observation and deftness of hand in such a developed degree; with them, therefore, these faculties recede into the background, and so also does the talent of faithfully depicting nature.”* Nothing could be truer. It should only be remembered that the transition to cattle-herding and agriculture. . . .¹⁸

Anfänge der Kunst, p. 190.

ART AND SOCIAL LIFE





I



The relation of art to social life is a question that has always figured largely in all literatures that have reached a definite stage of development. Most often, the question has been answered in one of two directly opposite senses.

Some say: man is not made for the sabbath, but the sabbath for man; society is not made for the artist, but the artist for society. The function of art is to assist the development of man's consciousness, to improve the social system.

Others emphatically reject this view. In their opinion, art is an *aim* in itself; to convert it into a *means* of achieving any extraneous aim, even the most noble, is to lower the dignity of creative production.

* The work here presented to the reader is a recast of a lecture which I delivered, in Russian, in Liege and Paris in November of this year [1912]. It has therefore to some degree retained the form of an oral delivery. Towards the end of the second part I shall examine certain objections addressed to me publicly in Paris by Mr. Lunacharsky concerning the criterion of beauty. I replied to them verbally at the time, but I consider it useful to discuss them in the press.

The first of these two views was vividly reflected in our progressive literature of the sixties. To say nothing of Pisarev, whose extreme one-sidedness almost turned it into a caricature,²⁰ one might mention Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov as the most thorough-going advocates of this view in the critical literature of the time. Chernyshevsky wrote in one of his earliest critical articles:

"The idea of 'art for art's sake' is as strange in our times as 'wealth for wealth's sake,' 'science for science's sake,' and so forth. All human activity must serve mankind if it is not to remain a useless and idle occupation. Wealth exists in order that man may benefit by it; science exists in order to be man's guide; art, too, must serve some useful purpose and not fruitless pleasure." In Chernyshevsky's opinion, the value of the arts, and especially of "the most serious of them," poetry, is determined by the sum of knowledge they disseminate in society. He says: "Art, or it would be better to say poetry (only poetry, for the other arts do very little in this respect), spreads among the mass of the reading public an enormous amount of knowledge and, what is still more important, familiarizes them with the concepts worked out by science—such is poetry's great purpose in life."* The same idea is expressed in his celebrated dissertation, "The Esthetic Relation of Art to Reality." According to its 17th thesis, art not only reproduces life but explains it: its productions very often "have the purpose of pronouncing judgement on the phenomena of life."

In the opinion of Chernyshevsky and his disciple, Dobrolyubov, the function of art was, indeed, to reproduce life and to pass judgement on its phenomena.** And this

* N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Collected Works*, 1906 ed., Vol. I, pp. 33-34.²¹

** This opinion was partly a reiteration and partly a further development of the views formulated by Belinsky towards the end of his life. In his article, "A View of Russian Literature of 1847," Belinsky wrote: "The highest and most sacred interest of society is

was not only the opinion of literary critics and theoreticians of art. It was not fortuitous that Nekrasov called his muse the muse of "vengeance and grief." In one of his poems the Citizen says to the Poet:

Thou poet by the heavens blessed,
Their chosen herald! It is wrong
That the deprived and dispossessed,
Are deaf to your inspired song.
Believe, men have not fallen wholly,
God lives yet in the heart of each
And still, though painfully and slowly,
The voice of faith their souls may reach.
Be thou a citizen, serve art.
And for thy fellow-beings live,
To them, to them thy loving heart
And all thy inspiration give.²²

In these words the Citizen Nekrasov sets forth his own understanding of the function of art. It was in exactly the same way that the function of art was understood at that time by the most outstanding representatives of the plastic arts—painting, for example. Perov and Kramskoi, like Nekrasov, strove to be "citizens," to serve art; their works, like his, passed "judgements on the phenomena of life."*

its own welfare, equally extended to each of its members. The road to this welfare is consciousness, and art can promote consciousness no less than science. Here science and art are equally indispensable, and neither science can replace art, nor art replace science." But art can develop man's knowledge only by "passing judgement on the phenomena of life." Chernyshevsky's dissertation is thus linked with Belinsky's final view of Russian literature.

* Kramskoi's letter to V. V. Stasov from Mentone, April 30, 1884, shows that he was strongly influenced by the views of Belinsky, Gogol, Fedotov, Ivanov, Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Perov (*Ivan Nikolayevich Kramskoi, His Life, Correspondence and Critical Articles*, St. Petersburg, 1888, p. 487). It should be observed, however, that the judgements on phenomena of life to be met with in Kramskoi's critical articles are far inferior in lucidity to those which we find, for example, in G. I. Uspensky, to say nothing of Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov.

The opposite view of the function of creative art had a powerful defender in Pushkin, the Pushkin of the time of Nicholas I. Everybody, of course, is familiar with such of his poems as "The Rabble" and "To the Poet." The people plead with the poet to compose songs that would improve social morals, but meet with a contemptuous, one might say rude, rebuff:

Begone, ye pharisees! What cares
The peaceful poet for your fate?
Go, boldly steep yourselves in sin:
With you the lyre will bear no weight.
Upon your deeds I turn my back.
The whip, the dungeon and the rack
Till now you suffered as the price
For your stupidity and vice
And, servile madmen, ever shall!

Pushkin set forth his view of the function of the poet in the much-quoted words:

No, not for worldly agitation,
Nor worldly greed, nor worldly strife,
But for sweet song, for inspiration,
For prayer the poet comes to life.²³

Here the so-called theory of art for art's sake is formulated in the most striking manner. It was not without reason that Pushkin was cited so readily and so often by the opponents of the literary movement of the sixties.²⁴

Which of these two directly opposite views of the function of art is to be considered correct?

In undertaking to answer this question, it must first be observed that it is badly formulated. Like all questions of a similar nature, it cannot be approached from the standpoint of "duty." If the artists of a given country at one period shun "agitation and strife," and, at another, long for strife and the agitation that necessarily goes with it, this is not because somebody prescribes for them different "duties" at different periods, but because in certain social conditions they are dominated by one attitude

of mind, and by another attitude of mind in other social conditions. Hence, if we are to approach the subject correctly, we must look at it not from the standpoint of what ought to be, but of what actually is and has been. We shall therefore formulate the question as follows:

What are the most important social conditions in which artists and people keenly interested in art conceive and become possessed by the belief in art for art's sake?

As we approach the answer to this question, it will not be difficult to answer another, one closely connected with it and no less interesting, namely:

What are the most important social conditions in which artists and people keenly interested in art conceive and become possessed by the so-called utilitarian view of art, that is, the tendency to attach to artistic productions the significance of "judgements on the phenomena of life"?

The first of these two questions impels us once again to recall Pushkin.

There was a time when he did not believe in the theory of art for art's sake. There was a time when he did not avoid strife, in fact, was eager for it. This was in the period of Alexander I. At that time he did not think that the "people" should be content with the whip, dungeon and rack. On the contrary, in the ode called "Freedom," he exclaimed with bitterness:

Unhappy nation! Everywhere
Men suffer under whips and chains,
And over all injustice reigns,
And haughty peers abuse their power
And sombre prejudice prevails.

But then his attitude of mind radically changed. In the days of Nicholas I he espoused the theory of art for art's sake. What was the reason for this fundamental change of attitude?

The reign of Nicholas I opened with the catastrophe of December 14,²⁵ which was to exert an immense influence

both on the subsequent development of our "society" and on the fate of Pushkin personally. With the suppression of the "Decembrists," the most educated and advanced representatives of the "society" of that time passed from the scene. This could not but considerably lower its moral and intellectual level. "Young as I was," Herzen says, "I remember how markedly high society declined and became more sordid and servile with the ascension of Nicholas to the throne. The independence of the aristocracy and the dashing spirit of the Guards characteristic of Alexander's time—all this disappeared in 1826." It was distressing for a sensitive and intelligent person to live in such a society. "Deadness and silence all around," Herzen wrote in another article: "All were submissive, inhuman and hopeless, and moreover extremely shallow, stupid and petty. He who sought for sympathy encountered a look of fright or the forbidding stare of the lackey; he was shunned or insulted." In Pushkin's letters of the time when "The Rabble" and "To the Poet" were written, we find him constantly complaining of the tedium and shallowness of both our capitals. But it was not only from the shallowness of the society around him that he suffered. His relations with the "ruling spheres" were also a source of grievous vexation.

According to the charming and very widespread legend, in 1826 Nicholas I graciously "forgave" Pushkin the political "errors of his youth," and even became his magnanimous patron. But this is far from the truth. Nicholas and his right-hand man in affairs of this kind, Chief of Police Benkendorf, "forgave" Pushkin nothing, and their "patronage" took the form of a long series of intolerable humiliations. Benkendorf reported to Nicholas in 1827: "After his interview with me, Pushkin spoke enthusiastically of Your Majesty in the English Club, and compelled his fellow-diners to drink Your Majesty's health. He is a regular ne'er-do-well, but if we succeed in directing his pen and his tongue, *it will be a good*

thing." The last words in this quotation reveal the secret of the "patronage" accorded to Pushkin. They wanted to make him a minstrel of the existing order of things. Nicholas I and Benkendorf had made it their aim to direct Pushkin's unruly muse into the channels of official morality. When, after Pushkin's death, Field Marshal Paskevich wrote to Nicholas: "I am sorry for Pushkin as a writer," the latter replied: "I fully share your opinion, but it may be said that in him one mourns the future, not the past."* This means that the never-to-be-forgotten emperor prized the dead poet not for the great things he had written in his short lifetime, but for what he *might have* written under proper police supervision and guidance. Nicholas had expected him to write "patriotic" works like Kukolnik's *The Hand of the All-Highest Saved Our Fatherland*. Even so unwordly a poet as V. A. Zhukovsky, who was withal a very good courtier, tried to tame him and inspire him with respect for conventional morals. In a letter to him dated April 12, 1826, he wrote: "Our adolescents (that is, all the ripening generation), poorly educated as they are, and therefore with nothing to buttress them in life, have become acquainted with your unruly thoughts clothed in the charm of poetry; you have already done much harm, incurable harm. This should cause you to tremble. Talent is nothing. The chief thing is moral grandeur..."** You will agree that, being in *such* a situation, wearing the chains of *such* tutelage, and having to listen to *such* instruction, it is quite excusable that he conceived a hatred for "moral grandeur," came to loathe the "benefits" which art might confer, and cried to his counsellors and patrons:

Begone, ye pharisees! What cares
The peaceful poet for your fate?

* P. Y. Shchogolev, *Pushkin. Essays*, St. Petersburg, 1912, p. 357.

** Ibid., p. 241.

In other words, being in such a situation, it was quite natural that Pushkin became a believer in art for art's sake and said to the Poet, in his own person:

You are a king, alone and free to go
Wherever your unfettered mind may lead,
Perfecting, fostering the children of your muse,
Demanding no reward for noble deed.²⁶

Pisarev would have taken issue with me and said that Pushkin's poet addressed these vehement words not to his patrons, but to the "people." But the real people never came within the purview of the writers of that time. With Pushkin, the word "people" had the same meaning as the word which is often to be found in his poems: "crowd." And this latter word, of course, does not refer to the labouring masses. In his "Gypsies," Pushkin describes the inhabitants of the stifling cities as follows:

Of love ashamed, of thought afraid,
Foul prejudices rule their brains.
Their liberty they gladly trade
For money to procure them chains.

It is hard to believe that this description refers, say, to the urban artisans.

If all this is true, then the following conclusion suggests itself:

The belief in art for art's sake arises wherever the artist is out of harmony with his social environment.

It might be said, of course, that the example of Pushkin is not sufficient to justify such a conclusion. I will not controvert or gainsay this. I will give other examples, this time borrowed from the history of French literature, that is, the literature of a country whose intellectual trends—at least down to the middle of the last century—met with the broadest sympathy throughout the European continent.

Pushkin's contemporaries, the French romanticists, were also, with few exceptions, ardent believers in art for

art's sake. Perhaps the most consistent of them, Theophile Gautier, abused the defenders of the utilitarian view of art in the following terms:

"No, you fools, no, you goitrous cretins, a book cannot be turned into gelatine soup, nor a novel into a pair of seamless boots. . . . By the intestines of all the Popes, future, past and present: No, and a thousand times no! . . . I am one of those who consider the superfluous essential; my love of things and people is in inverse proportion to the services they may render."*

In a biographical note on Baudelaire, this same Gautier highly praised the author of the *Fleurs du mal* for having upheld "the absolute autonomy of art and for not admitting that poetry had any aim but itself, or any mission but to excite in the soul of the reader the sensation of beauty, in the absolute sense of the term" ("l'autonomie absolue de l'art et qu'il n'admettait pas que la poésie eût d'autre but qu'elle même et d'autre mission à remplir que d'exciter dans l'âme du lecteur la sensation du beau; dans le sens absolue du terme").

How little the "idea of beauty" could associate in Gautier's mind with social and political ideas, may be seen from the following statement of his:

"I would very gladly (très joyeusement) renounce my rights as a Frenchman and citizen for the sake of seeing a genuine Raphael or a beautiful woman in the nude."

That, surely, is the limit. Yet all the Parnassians (les parnassiens)²⁷ would probably have agreed with Gautier, though some of them may have had certain reservations concerning the too paradoxical form in which he, especially in his youth, expressed the demand for the "absolute autonomy of art."

What was the reason for this attitude of mind of the French romanticists and Parnassians? Were they also out of harmony with their social environment?

* Preface to *Mlle de Maupin*.

In an article Theophile Gautier wrote in 1857 on the revival by the Théâtre Français of Alfred de Vigny's play *Chatterton*, he recalled its first performance on February 12, 1835. This is what he said:

"The parterre before which Chatterton declaimed was filled with pallid, long-haired youths, who firmly believed that there was no dignified occupation save writing poems or painting pictures... and who looked on the 'bourgeois' with a contempt hardly equalled by that which the fuchses of Heidelberg and Jena entertain for the philistine."*

Who were these contemptible "bourgeois"?

"They included," Gautier says, "nearly everybody—bankers, brokers, lawyers, merchants, shopkeepers, etc.—in a word, everyone who did not belong to the mystical cénacle (that is, the romanticist circle.—*G.P.*) and who earned their living by prosaic occupations."**

And here is further evidence. In a comment to one of his *Odes funambulesques*, Theodore de Banville admits that he too had been afflicted with this hatred of the "bourgeois." And he too explains who was meant by the term. "In the language of the romanticists, the word "bourgeois" meant "a man whose only god was the five-franc piece, who had no ideal but saving his own skin, and who, in poetry, loved sentimental romance, and in the plastic arts, lithography."***

Recalling this, de Banville begs his reader not to be surprised that his *Odes funambulesques*—which, mark, appeared towards the very end of the romantic period—treated people as unmitigated scoundrels only because they led a bourgeois mode of life and did not worship romantic geniuses.

These illustrations are fairly convincing evidence that

* *Histoire du romantisme*, Paris, 1895, pp. 153-54.

** *Ibid.*, p. 154.

*** *Les odes funambulesques*, Paris, 1858, pp. 294-95.

the romanticists really were out of harmony with their bourgeois social environment. True, there was nothing dangerous in this to the bourgeois social relationships. The romanticist circles consisted of young bourgeois who had no objection to these relationships, but were revolted by the sordidness, the tedium and the vulgarity of bourgeois existence. The new art with which they were so strongly infatuated was for them a refuge from this sordidness, tedium and vulgarity. In the latter years of the Restoration and in the first half of the reign of Louis Philippe, that is, in the best period of romanticism, it was the more difficult for the French youth to accustom themselves to the sordid, prosaic and tedious life of bourgeoisdom, as not long before that France had been living through the terrible storms of the Great Revolution and the Napoleonic era, which had deeply stirred all human passions.* When the bourgeoisie assumed the predominant position in society, and when its life was no longer warmed by the fire of the struggle for liberty, nothing was left for the new art but *to idealize negation of the bourgeois mode of life*. Romantic art was indeed such an

* Alfred de Musset describes this disharmony in the following words: "Dès lors se formèrent comme deux camps: d'une part les esprits exaltés souffrants; toutes les âmes expansives, qui ont besoin de l'infini, plièrent la tête en pleurant, ils s'enveloppèrent de rêves maladifs, et l'on ne vit plus que de frêles roseaux sur un océan d'amertume. D'une autre part, les hommes de chair restèrent debout, inflexibles, au milieu des jouissances positives, et il ne leur prit d'autre souci que de compter l'argent qu'ils avaient. Ce ne fut qu'un sanglot et un éclat de rire, l'un venant de l'âme, l'autre du corps." ["Two camps, as it were, formed: on one side, exalted and suffering minds, expansive souls who yearn for the infinite bowed their heads and wept, wrapped themselves in morbid dreams, and one saw nothing but frail reeds in an ocean of bitterness. On the other, men of the flesh remained erect, inflexible, giving themselves over to positive pleasures and knowing no care but the counting of their money. Nothing but sobs and bursts of laughter—the former coming from the soul, the latter from the body."] *La confession d'un enfant du siècle*, p. 10.

idealization. The romanticists strove to express their negation of bourgeois "moderation and conformity" not only in their artistic work, but even in their own external appearance. We have already heard from Gautier that the young men who filled the parterre at the first performance of *Chatterton* wore long hair. Who has not heard of Gautier's own red waistcoat, which made "decent people" shiver with horror? For the young romanticists, fantastic costume, like long hair, was a means of drawing a line between themselves and the detested bourgeois. The pale face was a similar means: it was, so to speak, a protest against bourgeois satiety.

Gautier says: "In those days it was the prevailing fashion in the romantic school to have as pallid a complexion as possible, even greenish, almost cadaverous. This lent a man a fateful, Byronic appearance, testified that he was devoured by passion and remorse. It made him look interesting in the eyes of women."* Gautier also tells us that the romanticists found it hard to forgive Victor Hugo his respectable appearance, and in private conversation often deplored this weakness of the great poet, "which made him kin with mankind, and even with the bourgeoisie."** It should be observed, in general, that the effort to assume a definite outward appearance always reflects the social relationships of the given period. An interesting sociological inquiry could be written on this theme.

This being the attitude of the young romanticists to the bourgeoisie, it was only natural that they were revolted by the idea of "useful art." In their eyes, to make art useful was tantamount to making it serve the bourgeoisie whom they despised so profoundly. This explains Gautier's vehement sallies against the preachers of useful art, which I have just cited, whom he calls "fools, goitrous

* Op. cit., p. 31.

** Ibid., p. 32.

cretins" and so on. It also explains the paradox that in his eyes the value of persons and things is in inverse proportion to the service they render. Essentially, all these sallies and paradoxes are a complete counterpart of Pushkin's:

Begone, ye pharisees! What cares
The peaceful poet for your fate?

The Parnassians and the early French realists (the Goncourts, Flaubert, etc.) likewise entertained an infinite contempt for the bourgeois society around them. They, too, were untiring in their abuse of the detested "bourgeois." If they printed their writings, it was not, they averred, for the benefit of the general reading public, but for a chosen few, "*pour des amis inconnus*" ("for unknown friends"), as Flaubert puts it in one of his letters. They maintained that only a writer who was devoid of serious talent could find favour with a wide circle of readers. Leconte de Lisle held that the popularity of a writer was proof of his intellectual inferiority (*signe d'infériorité intellectuelle*). It need scarcely be added that the Parnassians, like the romanticists, were staunch believers in the theory of art for art's sake.

Many similar examples might be given. But it is quite unnecessary. It is already sufficiently clear that the belief in art for art's sake arises among artists wherever they are out of harmony with the society around them. But it would not be amiss to define this disharmony more precisely.

At the close of the 18th century, in the period immediately preceding the Great Revolution, the progressive artists of France were likewise out of harmony with the prevailing "society" of the time. David and his friends were foes of the "old order." And this disharmony was of course hopeless, because reconciliation between them and the old order was quite impossible. More, the disharmony between David and his friends and the old order

was incomparably deeper than the disharmony between the romanticists and bourgeois society: whereas David and his friends desired the abolition of the old order, Theophile Gautier and his colleagues, as I have repeatedly said, had no objection to the bourgeois social relationships; all they wanted was that the bourgeois system should cease producing vulgar bourgeois habits.*

But in revolting against the old order, David and his friends were well aware that behind them marched the serried columns of the third estate, which was soon, in the well-known words of Abbé Sicyès, to become everything. With them, consequently, the feeling of disharmony with the *prevailing order* was supplemented by a feeling of sympathy with the *new society* which had matured within the womb of the old and was preparing to replace it. But with the romanticists and the Parnassians we find nothing of the kind: they neither expected nor desired a change in the social system of the France of their time. That is why their disharmony with the society around them was quite hopeless.** Nor did our Pushkin expect any change in the

* Theodore de Banville says explicitly that the romanticists' attacks on the "bourgeois" were not directed against the bourgeoisie as a social class (*Les Odes funambulesques*, Paris, 1858, p. 294). This *conservative* revolt of the romanticists against the "bourgeois," but not against the foundations of the bourgeois system, has been understood by some of our present-day Russian... theoreticians (Mr. Ivanov-Razumnik, for instance) as a struggle against bourgeoisdom which was far superior in scope to the social and political struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. I leave it to the reader to judge the profundity of this conception. In reality, it points to the regrettable fact that people who undertake to expound the history of Russian social thought do not always go to the trouble of acquainting themselves preliminarily with the history of thought in Western Europe.

** The attitude of mind of the German romanticists was marked by an equally hopeless disharmony with their social environment, as is excellently shown by Brandes in his *Die romantische Schule in Deutschland*, which is the second volume of his work, *Die Hauptströmungen der Litteratur des 19-ten Jahrhunderts*.

Russia of his time. And in the period of Nicholas, moreover, it is probable that he no longer wished for any change. *That is why* his view of social life was similarly tinged with pessimism.

Now, I think, I can amplify my former conclusion and say:

The belief in art for art's sake arises when artists and people keenly interested in art are hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment.

But this is not the whole matter. The example of our "men of the sixties," who firmly believed in the early triumph of reason, and that of David and his friends, who held this belief no less firmly, show that *the so-called utilitarian view of art, that is, the tendency to impart to its productions the significance of judgements on the phenomena of life, and the joyful eagerness, which always accompanies it, to take part in social strife, arises and spreads wherever there is mutual sympathy between a considerable section of society and people who have a more or less active interest in creative art.*

How far this is true, is definitely shown by the following fact.

When the refreshing storm of the February Revolution of 1848 broke, many of the French artists who had believed in the theory of art for art's sake emphatically rejected it. Even Baudelaire, who was subsequently cited by Gautier as the model example of an artist who believed inflexibly that art must be absolutely autonomous, began at once to put out a revolutionary journal, *Le salut public*. True, its publication was soon discontinued, but as late as 1852 Baudelaire, in his foreword to Pierre Dupont's *Chansons*, called the theory of art for art's sake infantile (puérile), and declared that art must have a social purpose. Only the triumph of the counter-revolution induced Baudelaire and artists of a similar trend of mind to revert to the "infantile" theory of art for art's sake. One of the future luminaries of "Parnassus," Leconte de

Lisle, brought out the psychological significance of this reversion very distinctly in the preface to his *Poèmes antiques*, the first edition of which appeared in 1852. He said that poetry would no longer stimulate heroic actions or inculcate social virtues, because now, as in all periods of literary decadence, its sacred language could express only petty personal emotions (mesquines impressions personnelles) and was no longer capable of instructing (n'est plus apte à enseigner l'homme).^{*} Addressing the poets, Leconte de Lisle said that the human race, whose teachers they had once been, had now outgrown them.^{**} Now, in the words of the future Parnassian, the task of poetry was "to give an ideal life" to those who had no "real life" (donner la vie idéale à celui qui n'a pas la vie réelle).^{***} These profound words disclose the whole psychological secret of the belief in art for art's sake. We shall have many an occasion to revert to Leconte de Lisle's preface from which I have just quoted.

To conclude with this side of the question, I would say, in addition, that political authority always prefers the utilitarian view of art, to the extent, of course, that it pays any attention to art at all. And this is understandable: it is to its interest to harness all ideologies to the service of the cause which it serves itself. And since political authority, although sometimes revolutionary, is most often conservative and even reactionary, it will be seen that it would be wrong to think that the utilitarian view of art is shared principally by revolutionaries, or by people of advanced mind generally. The history of Russian literature shows very clearly that it has not been shunned even by our "protectors." Here are some examples. The first three parts of V. T. Narezhny's novel, *A Russian Gil Blas, or the Adventures of Count Gavril Simonovich Chistyakov*,

^{*} *Poèmes antiques*, Paris, 1852, Preface, p. vii.

^{**} *Ibid.*, p. ix.

^{***} *Ibid.*, p. xi.

were published in 1814. The book was at once banned at the instance of the Minister of Public Education, Count Razumovsky, who took the occasion to express the following opinion on the relation of literature to life:

"All too often authors of novels, although apparently campaigning against vice, paint it in such colours or describe it in such detail as to lure young people into vices which it would have been better not to mention at all. Whatever the literary merit of a novel may be, its publication can be sanctioned only when it has a truly moral purpose."

As we see, Razumovsky believed that art cannot be an aim in itself.

Art was regarded in exactly the same way by those servitors of Nicholas I who, by virtue of their official position, were obliged to have some opinion on the subject. You will remember that Benkendorf tried to direct Pushkin into the path of virtue. Nor was Ostrovsky denied the solicitous attention of authority. When, in March 1850, his comedy, *Our Own Folks—We'll Settle It Among Ourselves*, was published and certain enlightened lovers of literature—and trade—conceived the fear that it might offend the merchant class, the then Minister of Public Education (Count Shirinsky-Shikhmatov) ordered the guardian of the Moscow Educational Area to invite the young dramatist to come and see him, and "make him understand that the noble and useful purpose of talent consists not only in the lively depiction of ludicrous or evil manners, but in justly condemning them; not only in caricature, but in inculcating lofty moral sentiments; consequently, in offsetting vice with virtue, the ridiculous and criminal with thoughts and actions that elevate the soul; lastly, in strengthening the faith, which is so important to social and private life, that evil deeds meet with fitting retribution already *here on earth*."

Tsar Nicholas himself looked upon art chiefly from the "moral" standpoint. As we know, he shared Benkendorf's

opinion that it would be a good thing to tame Pushkin. He said of Ostrovsky's play, *Don't Get Into Another's Sleigh*, written at the time when Ostrovsky had fallen under the influence of the Slavophiles²⁸ and was fond of saying at convivial banquets that, with the help of some of his friends, he would "undo all the work" of Peter²⁹—of this play, which in a certain sense was distinctly didactic, Nicholas I said with praise: "Ce n'est pas une pièce, c'est une leçon."* Not to multiply examples, I shall confine myself to the two following facts. When N. Polevoi's *Moskovsky Telegraf* printed an unfavourable review of Kukolnik's "patriotic" play, *The Hand of the All-Highest Saved Our Fatherland*, the journal became anathema in the eyes of Nicholas's ministers and was banned. But when Polevoi himself wrote patriotic plays—*Grandad of the Russian Navy* and *Igolkin the Merchant*—the tsar, Polevoi's brother relates, was delighted with his dramatic talent. "The author is unusually gifted," he said. "He should write, write and write. Yes write (he smiled), not publish magazines."**

And don't think the Russian rulers were an exception in this respect. No, so typical an exponent of absolutism as Louis XIV of France was no less firmly convinced that art could not be an aim in itself, but must be an instrument of moral education. And all the literature and all the art of the celebrated era of Louis XIV was permeated through and through with this conviction. Napoleon I would similarly have looked upon the theory of art for art's sake as a pernicious invention of loathsome "ideologists." He, too, wanted literature and art to serve moral purposes. And in this he largely succeeded, as witnessed for example by the fact that most of the pictures in the periodical exhibitions (Salons) of the time

* [It is not a play, it's a lesson.]

** *Memoirs of Xenofont Polevoi*, Suvorin Publishing House, St. Petersburg, 1888, p. 445.

were devoted to the warlike feats of the Consulate and the Empire. His little nephew, Napoleon III, followed in his footsteps, though with far less success. He, too, tried to make art and literature serve what he called morality. In November 1852, Professor Laprade of Lyons scathingly ridiculed this Bonapartist penchant for didactic art in a satire called *Les muses d'Etat*. He predicted that the time would soon come when the "state muses" would place human reason under military discipline; then order would reign and not a single writer would dare to express the slightest dissatisfaction.

Il faut être content, s'il pleut, s'il fait soleil,
S'il fait chaud, s'il fait froid: "Ayez le teint vermeil.
Je déteste les gens maigres, à face pâle;
Celui qui ne rit pas mérite qu'on l'empale." etc.*

I shall remark in passing that for this witty satire Laprade was deprived of his professorial post. The government of Napoleon III could not tolerate jibes at the "state muses."

* [One must be content in sunshine and rain, in heat or cold: "Be of ruddy countenance; I detest lean and pallid men. He who does not laugh deserves to be impaled."]



II



But let us leave the government "spheres." Among the French writers of the Second Empire there were some who rejected the theory of art for art's sake from anything but progressive considerations. Alexandre Dumas fils, for instance, declared categorically that the words "art for art's sake" were devoid of meaning. His plays, *Le fils naturel* and *Le Père Prodigue* were devoted to the furtherance of definite social aims. He considered it necessary to bolster up with his writings the "old society," which, in his own words, was crumbling on all sides.

Reviewing, in 1857, the literary work of Alfred Musset who had just died, Lamartine regretted that it had contained no expression of religious, social, political or patriotic beliefs (foi), and he rebuked the contemporary poets for ignoring sense in their infatuation for rhyme and rhythm. Lastly—to cite a literary figure of much smaller calibre—Maxime Ducamp, condemning the passion for form alone, exclaimed:

La forme est belle soit! quand l'idée est au fond!
Qu'est ce donc qu'un beau front, qui n'a pas de cervelle?*

He also attacked the head of the romantic school in painting, saying: "Just as some writers have created art for art's sake, Mr. Delacroix has invented *colour for colour's sake*. With him, history and mankind are an excuse for combining well-chosen tints." In the opinion of this same writer, the art-for-art's-sake school had definitely outlived its day.**

Lamarline and Maxime Ducamp can no more be suspected of destructive tendencies than Alexandre Dumas fils. They rejected the theory of art for art's sake not because they wanted to replace the bourgeois order by a new social system, but because they wanted to bolster up the bourgeois relationships, which had been seriously shaken by the liberation movement of the proletariat. In this respect they differed from the romanticists—and especially from the Parnassians and the early realists—only in that which disposed them to be far more conciliatory towards the bourgeois mode of life. They were conservative optimists where the others were conservative pessimists.

It follows convincingly from all this that the utilitarian view of art can just as well cohabit with a conservative, as with a revolutionary attitude of mind. The tendency to adopt this view necessarily presupposes only one condition: a lively and active interest in a specific social order or social ideal—no matter which; and it disappears when, for one reason or another, this interest evaporates.

We shall proceed to examine which of these two opposite views of art is more conducive to its progress.

* [Form is beautiful, true, when there is thought beneath it: What is the use of a beautiful forehead, if there is no brain behind it?]

** See A. Cassagne's excellent book, *La théorie de l'art pour l'art en France chez les derniers romantiques et les premiers réalistes*, Paris, 1906, pp. 96-105.

Like all questions of social life and social thought, this question does not permit of an unconditional answer. Everything depends on the conditions of time and place. Remember Nicholas I and his servitors. They wanted to turn Pushkin, Ostrovsky and the other contemporary artists into ministers of morality, as it was understood by the Corps of Gendarmes. Let us assume for a moment that they had succeeded in their firm determination. What would have come of it? This is easily answered. The muses of the artists who had succumbed to their influence, having become state muses, would have betrayed the most evident signs of decadence, and would have diminished exceedingly in truthfulness, forcefulness and attractiveness.

Pushkin's "Slanderers of Russia" cannot be classed among the best of his poetical creations. Ostrovsky's *Don't Get Into Another's Sleigh*, acknowledged by his gracious majesty as a "useful lesson," is not such a wonderful thing either. Yet in this play Ostrovsky made but a step or two toward the ideal which the Benkendorfs, Shirinsky-Shikhmatovs and *similar believers* in useful art were striving to realize.

Let us assume, further, that Theophile Gautier, Theodore de Banville, Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, the Goncourts, Flaubert—in a word, the romanticists, the Parnassians and the early French realists—had reconciled themselves to their bourgeois environment and dedicated their muses to the service of the gentry who, in the words of de Banville, prized the five-franc piece above all else. What would have come of it?

This, again, is easily answered. The romanticists, the Parnassians and the early French realists would have sunk very low. Their productions would have become far less forceful, far less truthful and far less attractive.

Which is superior in artistic merit: Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or Augier's *Gendre de Monsieur Poirier*? Surely,

it is superfluous to ask. And the difference is not only in talent. Augier's dramatic vulgarity, which was the very apotheosis of bourgeois "moderation and conformity," necessarily called for different creative methods than those employed by Flaubert, the Goncourts and the other realists who contemptuously turned their backs on this moderation and conformity. Lastly, there must have been a reason why one literary trend attracted far more talented men than the other.

What does this prove?

It proves a point which romanticists like Theophile Gautier would never agree with, namely, that the merit of an artistic work is determined in the final analysis by the weightiness of its content. Gautier not only maintained that poetry does not try to prove anything, but that it even does not try to say anything, and that the beauty of a poem is determined by its music, its rhythm. But this is a profound error. On the contrary, poetic and artistic works generally always *say* something, because they always *express* something. Of course, they have their own way of "saying" things. The artist expresses his idea in images; the publicist demonstrates his thought with the help of *logical conclusions*. And if a writer operates with logical conclusions instead of images, or if he invents images in order to demonstrate a definite theme, then he is not an artist but a publicist, even if he does not write essays or articles, but novels, stories or plays. All this is true. But it does not follow that ideas are of no importance in artistic productions. I go further and say that there is no such thing as an artistic production which is devoid of idea. Even productions whose authors lay store only on form and are not concerned for their content, nevertheless express some idea in one way or another. Gautier, who had no concern for the idea content of his poetical works, declared, as we know, that he was prepared to sacrifice his political rights as a French citizen for the pleasure of seeing a genuine Raphael or a

beautiful woman in the nude. The one was closely connected with the other: his exclusive concern for form was a product of his social and political indifferentism. Productions whose authors lay store only on form always reflect a definite—and as I have already explained, a *hopelessly negative*—attitude of their authors to their social environment. And in this lies an idea common to all of them in general, and expressed in a different way by each in particular. But while there is no such thing as an artistic work which is entirely devoid of idea, not every idea can be expressed in an artistic work. This is excellently put by Ruskin when he says that a maiden may sing of her lost love, but a miser cannot sing of his lost money. And he rightly observes that the merit of an artistic work is determined by the loftiness of the sentiments it expresses. "Question with yourselves respecting any feeling that has taken strong possession of your mind. 'Could this be sung by a master, and sung nobly, with a true melody and art?' Then it is a right feeling. Could it not be sung at all, or only sung ludicrously? It is a base one." This is true, and it cannot be otherwise. Art is a means of intellectual communication. And the loftier the sentiment expressed in an artistic work, the more effectively, other conditions being equal, can the work serve as such a means. Why cannot a miser sing of his lost money? Simply because, if he did sing of his loss, his song would not move anybody, that is, could not serve as a means of communication between himself and other people.

What about martial songs, I may be asked; does war, too, serve as a means of communication between man and man? My reply is that while martial poetry expresses hatred of the enemy, it at the same time extols the devoted courage of soldiers, their readiness to die for their country, their nation, etc. In so far as it expresses this readiness, it serves as a means of communication between man and man within limits (tribe, community,

nation) whose extent is determined by the level of cultural development attained by mankind, or, more exactly, by the given section of mankind.

Turgenev, who had a strong dislike for preachers of the utilitarian view of art, once said that Venus of Milo is more indubitable than the principles of 1789. He was quite right. But what does it show? Certainly not what Turgenev wanted to show.

There are very many people in the world to whom the principles of 1789 are not only "dubitable," but entirely unknown. Ask a Hottentot who has not been to a European school what he thinks of these principles, and you will find that he has never heard of them. But not only are the principles of 1789 unknown to the Hottentot; so is the Venus of Milo. And if he ever happened to see her, he would certainly "have his doubts" about her. He has his own ideal of feminine beauty, depictions of which are often to be met with in anthropological works under the name of the Hottentot Venus. The Venus of Milo is "indubitably" attractive only to a part of the white race. To this part of the race she really is more indubitable than the principles of 1789. But why? Solely because these principles express relationships that correspond only to a certain phase in the development of the white race—the time when the bourgeois order was establishing itself in its struggle against the feudal order*—whereas the

* Article 2 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, adopted by the French Constituent Assembly at its sittings of August 20-26, 1789, reads: "Le but de toute association politique est la conservation des droits naturels et imprescriptibles de l'homme. Ces droits sont: la liberté, la propriété, la sûreté et la résistance à l'oppression." ["The object of every civic association is the protection of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are: liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression."] The concern for *property* testifies to the bourgeois character of the revolution, while the recognition of the right to "resist oppression" indicates that the revolution had only just taken place

Venus of Milo is an ideal of the female form which corresponds to *many* stages in this development. Many, but not all.

The Christians had their own ideal of the female exterior. It is to be seen on Byzantine icons. Everybody knows that the worshippers of these icons were very "dubious" of the Milo and all other Venuses. They called them she-devils and, wherever they could, destroyed them. Then came a time when the antique she-devils again became pleasing to people of the white race. The way to this was prepared by the liberation movement of the West-European burghers—the movement, that is, which was most vividly reflected in the principles of 1789. Turgenev notwithstanding, therefore, we may say that Venus of Milo became the more "indubitable" in the new Europe, the more the European population became ripe for the proclamation of the principles of 1789. This is not a paradox; it is a sheer historical fact. The whole meaning of the history of art in the period of the Renaissance—regarded from the standpoint of the concept of beauty—is that the Christian-monastic ideal of the human exterior was gradually forced into the background by that mundane ideal which owed its origin to the liberation movement of the towns, and whose elaboration was facilitated by memories of the antique she-devils. Even Belinsky—who toward the end of his literary career quite rightly affirmed that "pure, abstract, unconditional, or as the philosophers say, *absolute*, art never existed anywhere"—was nevertheless prepared to admit that "the productions of the Italian school of painting of the 16th century in some degree approximated to the ideal of absolute art," since they were the creations of an epoch in which "art

but had not been completed, having met with strong resistance from the lay and spiritual aristocracy. In June 1848 the French bourgeoisie no longer recognized the right of the citizen to resist oppression.

was the chief interest exclusively of the most educated part of society.”³⁰ He pointed, in illustration, to “Raphael’s ‘Madonna,’ that chef-d’œuvre of 16th-century Italian painting,” that is, the so-called Sistine Madonna which is now in the Dresden Gallery. But the Italian schools of the 16th century were the culmination of a long process of struggle of the mundane ideal against the Christian-monastic. And however exclusive may have been the interest in art of the highly educated section of 16th-century society,* it is indisputable that Raphael’s Madonnas are one of the most typical artistic expressions of the victory of the mundane ideal over the Christian-monastic.

This may be said without any exaggeration even of those whom Raphael painted when he was still under the influence of his teacher Perugino, and whose faces seemingly reflect purely religious sentiments. But behind their religious exterior one discerns such a vitality and such a healthy joy in purely mundane living, that they no longer have anything in common with the pious Virgin Marys of the Byzantine masters.**

The productions of the Italian 16th-century masters were no more creations of “absolute art” than were those of all the earlier masters, beginning with Cimabue and Duccio di Buoninsegna. Indeed, such art had never existed anywhere. And if Turgenev referred to the Venus of Milo as a product of such art, it was because he, like all idealists, had a mistaken notion of the course of man’s esthetic development.

* Its exclusiveness, which cannot be denied, only signified that in the 16th century the people who prized art were hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment. Then, too, this disharmony induced a gravitation towards pure art, that is, towards art for art’s sake. Previously, in the time of Giotto, say, there had been no such disharmony and no such gravitation.

** It is noteworthy that Perugino himself was suspected by his contemporaries of being an atheist.

The ideal of beauty prevailing at any time in any society or class of society is rooted partly in the biological conditions of mankind's development—which, incidentally, also produce distinctive racial features—and partly in the historical conditions in which the given society or class arose and exists. It therefore always has a very rich content that is not absolute, not unconditional, but quite specific. He who worships "pure beauty" does not thereby become independent of the biological and historical social conditions which determine his esthetic taste; he only more or less consciously closes his eyes to these conditions. This, incidentally, was the case with romanticists like Theophile Gautier. I have already said that his exclusive interest in the form of poetical productions stood in close causal relation with his social and political indifferentism.

This indifferentism enhanced the merit of his poetic work to the extent that it saved him from succumbing to bourgeois vulgarity, to bourgeois moderation and conformity. But it detracted from its merit to the extent that it narrowed Gautier's outlook and prevented him from absorbing the progressive ideas of his time. Let us turn again to the already familiar preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, with its almost childish petulant attacks on the defenders of the utilitarian view of art. In this preface, Gautier exclaims:

"My God, how stupid it is, this supposed faculty of mankind for self-perfection of which our ears are tired of hearing! One might think that the human machine is capable of improvement, and that, by adjusting a wheel or rearranging a counterpoise, we can make it perform its functions more effectively."*

To prove that this is not so, Gautier cites Marshal de Bassompierre, who drank the health of his guns in a bootful of wine. He observes that it would be just as dif-

* *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Preface, p. 23.

ficult to perfect the marshal in the matter of drinking as it would be for the man of today to surpass, in the matter of eating, Milo of Crotona, who devoured a whole bull at one sitting. These remarks, which are quite true in themselves, are eminently characteristic of the theory of art for art's sake in the form in which it was professed by the consistent romanticists.

Who was it, one asks, that tired Gautier's ears with the assertion that mankind is capable of self-perfection? The Socialists—more precisely, the Saint-Simonists, who had been very popular in France not long before *Made-moiselle de Maupin* appeared. It was against the Saint-Simonists that he directed the remarks, quite true in themselves, about the difficulty of excelling Marshal de Bassompierre in wine-bibbing and Milo of Crotona in gluttony. But these remarks, although quite true in themselves, are entirely inappropriate when directed against the Saint-Simonists. The self-perfection of mankind which they were referring to had nothing to do with enlarging the capacity of the stomach. What the Saint-Simonists had in mind was improvement of the social organization in the interest of the most numerous section of the population, that is, the working people, the producing section. To call this aim stupid, and to ask whether it would have the effect of increasing man's capacity to over-indulge in wine and meat, was to betray the very bourgeois narrow-mindedness which was such a thorn in the flesh to the young romanticists. What was the reason for this? How could the bourgeois narrow-mindedness have crept into the reflections of a writer who saw the whole meaning of his existence in combating it tooth and nail?

I have already answered this question several times, although in passing, and, as the Germans say, in another connection. I answered it by comparing the romanticists' attitude of mind with that of David and his friends. I said that, although the romanticists revolted against bourgeois tastes and habits, they had no objection to the

bourgeois social system. We must now examine this point more thoroughly.

Some of the romanticists—George Sand, for example, at the time of her intimacy with Pierre Leroux—were sympathetic to socialism. But they were exceptions. The general rule was that the romanticists, although they revolted against bourgeois vulgarity, had a deep dislike for socialist systems, which called for social reform. The romanticists wanted to change social manners without in any way changing the social system. This, needless to say, was quite impossible. Consequently, the romanticists' revolt against the "bourgeois" had just as little practical consequence as the contempt of the Göttingen or Jena fuchses for the philistines. From the practical aspect, the romanticist revolt against the "bourgeois" was absolutely fruitless. But its practical fruitlessness had literary consequences of no little importance. It imparted to the romantic heroes that stilted and affected character which in the end led to the collapse of the school. Stilted and affected heroes cannot be considered a merit in an artistic work, and we must now therefore accompany the aforesaid *good mark* with a *bad mark*: *while the artistic productions of the romanticists gained considerably from their authors' revolt against the "bourgeois," they lost no little from the fact that the revolt had no practical meaning.*

The early French realists strove to eliminate the chief defect of romanticist productions, namely, the affected, stilted character of their heroes. There is not a trace of the romanticist affectedness and stiltedness in the novels of Flaubert (with the exception, perhaps, of *Salammbô* and *Les Contes*). The early realists continued to revolt against the "bourgeois," but did so in a different manner. They did not set up in contrast to the bourgeois vulgar-ians heroes who had no counterpart in reality, but rather sought to make the vulgar-ians the object of faithful artistic representation. Flaubert considered it his duty to

be as objective in his attitude to the social environment he described as the natural scientist is in his attitude to nature. "One must treat people as one does the mastodon or the crocodile," he said. "Why be vexed because some have horns and others jaws? Show them as they are, make stuffed models of them, put them into spirit jars. But don't pass moral judgement on them. And who are you yourselves, you little toads?" And to the extent that Flaubert succeeded in being objective, to that extent the characters he drew in his works acquired the significance of "documents" the study of which is absolutely essential for all who engage in a scientific investigation of social psychology. Objectivity was a powerful feature of his method; but while he was objective in the process of artistic creation, Flaubert never ceased to be deeply subjective in his opinion of contemporary social movements. With him, as with Theophile Gautier, harsh contempt for the "bourgeois" went hand in hand with a strong dislike for all who in one way or other militated against the bourgeois social relationships. With him, in fact, the dislike was even stronger. He was an inveterate opponent of universal suffrage, which he called a "disgrace to the human mind." "Under universal suffrage," he said in a letter to George Sand, "number outweighs mind, education, race, and even money, which is worth more than number (*argent . . . vaut mieux que le nombre*)." He says in another letter that universal suffrage is more stupid than the right of divine mercy. He conceived socialist society as "a great monster which would swallow up all individual action, all personality, all thought, which would direct everything and do everything." We thus see that in his disapproval of democracy and socialism, this hater of the "bourgeois" was fully at one with the most narrow-minded ideologists of the bourgeoisie. And this same trait is to be observed in all his contemporaries who professed art for art's sake. Baudelaire, having long forgotten his revolutionary *Salut public*, said in an essay on the life

of Edgar Poe: "Among a people which has no aristocracy, the cult of the beautiful can only deteriorate, decline and disappear." He says in this same essay that there are only three worthy beings: "the priest, the soldier and the poet." This is something more than conservatism; it is a definitely reactionary state of mind. Just as much a reactionary is Barbey d'Aurévilly. Speaking, in his book *Les Poètes*, of the poetic works of Laurent-Pichat, he says that he might have been a greater poet "if he had wished to trample upon atheism and democracy, those two dishonours (ces deux déshonneurs) of his thought."*

Much water has flown under the bridges since Théophile Gautier wrote his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. The Saint-Simonists, who supposedly tired his ears with talk about mankind's faculty for self-perfection, had loudly proclaimed the necessity for social reform. But, like most utopian Socialists, they were believers in peaceful social development, and were *therefore* no less determined opponents of class struggle. Moreover, the utopian Socialists addressed themselves chiefly to the rich. They did not believe that the proletariat could act independently. But the events of 1848 showed that its independent action could be very formidable. After 1848, the question was no longer whether the rich would be willing to improve the lot of the poor, but, rather, who would gain the upper hand in the struggle between the rich and the poor? The relations between the classes of modern society had become greatly simplified. All the ideologists of the bourgeoisie now realized that the point at issue was whether it could succeed in holding the labouring masses in economic subjection. This realization also penetrated to the minds of the believers in art for the rich. One of the most remarkable of them in respect to his importance to science, Ernest Renan, demanded, in his *Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, a strong government "which would com-

* [*Les poètes*, MDCCCXCIII, p. 260.]

pel the good rustics to do our share of the work while we devoted ourselves to mental speculation" ("qui force de bons rustiques de faire notre part de travail pendant que nous spéculons").*

The fact that the bourgeois ideologists were now infinitely more cognizant of the import of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat could not but exert a powerful influence on the nature of their "mental speculations." Ecclesiastes put it excellently: "Surely oppression (of others) maketh a wise man mad." Having discovered the secret of the struggle between their class and the proletariat, the bourgeois ideologists gradually lost the faculty for calm scientific investigation of social phenomena. And this greatly lowered the inherent value of their more or less scientific works. Whereas, formerly, bourgeois political economy was able to produce scientific giants like David Ricardo, now the tone among its exponents was set by such garrulous dwarfs as Frédéric Bastiat. Philosophy was increasingly invaded by idealist reaction, the essence of which was a conservative urge to reconcile the achievements of modern science with the old religious legends, or, to put it more accurately, to reconcile the chapel with the laboratory.** Nor did art escape the general fate. We shall see later to what utter

* Quoted by Cassagne in his *La théorie de l'art pour l'art chez les derniers romantiques et les premiers réalistes*, pp. 194-95.

** "On peut, sans contradiction, aller successivement à son laboratoire et à son oratoire" ["one can, without contradiction, go successively to one's laboratory and one's chapel"], Grasset, professor of clinical medicine at Montpellier, said ten years or so ago. This dictum is reiterated with delight by such theorists as Jules Soury, author of *Bréviaire de l'histoire du matérialisme*, a book written in the spirit of Lange's work on the same theme. See the article "Oratoire et laboratoire," in Soury's *Campagnes nationalistes*, Paris, 1902, pp. 233-66, 267. See also, in the same book, the article "Science et Religion," the chief idea of which is expressed in the words of Du-Bois Reymond: *ignoramus et ignorabimus* [we do not know and never will know].

absurdities some of the modern painters have been led under the influence of the present idealist reaction. For the present I shall say the following.

The conservative and, in part, even reactionary mentality of the early realists did not prevent them from making a thorough study of their environment and creating things of great artistic value. But there can be no doubt that it seriously narrowed their field of view. Turning their backs in hostility on the great liberation movement of their time, they excluded the most interesting specimens from the "mastodons" and "crocodiles" they observed, those which possessed the richest internal life. Their objective attitude to the environment they studied implied, in fact, a lack of sympathy with it. And, naturally, they could not sympathize with that which, owing to their conservatism, was alone accessible to their observation, namely, the "petty thoughts" and "petty passions" which bred in the "filthy slime"³¹ of commonplace middle-class existence. But this lack of sympathy with the objects they observed or portrayed was bound pretty soon to lead, as it did lead, to a decline of interest. Naturalism, the first beginnings of which were laid by their splendid writings, soon landed, as Huysmans put it, "in a blind alley, in a blocked tunnel." It was able, in Huysmans' words, to make everything its theme, syphilis included.* But the modern working-class movement was beyond its scope. I have not forgotten, of course, that Zola wrote *Germinal*. But leaving aside the weak points of this novel, it must be remembered that, while Zola himself began, as he said, to incline towards socialism, his so-called experimental method was, and remained, ill-suited for a scientific study and description of great social movements. This method was intimately linked with the standpoint of that materialism which Marx called natural-

* In saying this, Huysmans was hinting at the novel of the Belgian author Tabarant: *Les virus d'amour*.

scientific, and which fails to realize that the actions, inclinations, tastes and habits of mind of *social* man cannot be adequately explained by *physiology* or *pathology*, since they are determined by *social relationships*. Artists who remained faithful to this method could study and depict their "mastodons" and "crocodiles" as individuals, but not as members of a great whole. This Huysmans sensed when he said that naturalism had landed in a blind alley and had nothing left but to relate once more the love affair of the first chance wine-merchant with the first chance grocery woman.* Stories of such relationships could be of interest only if they shed light on some aspect of social relationships, as Russian realism did. But social interest was lacking in the French realists. The result was that, in the end, the relation of "the love affair of the first chance wine-merchant with the first chance grocery woman" became uninteresting, boring, even revolting. Huysmans himself in his first productions—in the novel, *Les Sœurs Vatard*, for instance—had been a pure naturalist. But growing tired of depicting "the seven mortal sins" (his own words again), he abandoned naturalism, and, as the German saying goes, threw out the baby with the bath water. In *A Rebours*—a strange novel, in places extremely tedious, but, because of its very defects, highly instructive—he depicted—or, better, as they used to say of old, *created*—in the person of Des Esseintes a sort of superman (a member of the degenerate aristocracy), whose whole manner of life was intended to represent a complete negation of the life of the "wine-merchant" and the "grocery woman." The invention of such types was one more confirmation of Leconte de Lisle's idea that where there is no real life it is the task of poetry to provide an ideal life. But the ideal life of Des Esseintes was so entirely bereft of human content

* See Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, conversation with Huysmans, pp. 176-77.

that its *creation* offered no way out of the blind alley. So Huysmans betook himself to mysticism, which served as an "ideal" escape from a situation from which there was no "real" escape. This was perfectly natural in the given circumstances. But see what we get.

An artist who turns mystic does not ignore idea content; he only lends it a peculiar character. Mysticism is itself an idea, but an idea which is as obscure and formless as fog, and which is at mortal enmity with reason. The mystic is quite willing to say something and even prove something. But he tells of things that are "not of this world," and he bases his proofs on a negation of common sense. Huysmans' case again shows that there can be no artistic production without idea content. But when artists become blind to the major social trends of their time, the inherent value of the ideas they express in their works is seriously impaired. And their works inevitably suffer in consequence.

This fact is so important in the history of art and literature that we must thoroughly examine it from various angles. But before doing so, let us sum up the conclusions to which we have been led so far by our inquiry.

The belief in art for art's sake arises and takes root wherever people engaged in art are hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment. This disharmony reflects favourably on artistic production to the extent that it helps the artists to rise above their environment. Such was the case with Pushkin in the period of Nicholas I. It was also the case with the romanticists, the Parnassians and the early realists in France. By multiplying examples, it might be shown that this has always been the case wherever such a disharmony existed. But while revolting against the vulgarity of their social environment, the romanticists, the Parnassians and the realists had no objection to the social relationships in which this vulgarity was rooted. On the contrary, although they cursed the "bourgeois," they treasured the bourgeois sys-

tem—first instinctively, then quite consciously. And the stronger the movement for liberation from the bourgeois system became in modern Europe, the more conscious was the attachment of the French believers in art for art's sake to this system. And the more conscious their attachment to this system became, the less were they able to remain indifferent to the idea content of their productions. But because of their blindness to the new trend which aimed at the complete remaking of social life, their views were mistaken, narrow and one-sided, and detracted from the quality of the ideas they expressed in their works. The natural result was that French realism landed in a hopeless quandary, which engendered decadent proclivities and mystical tendencies in writers who had themselves at one time belonged to the realistic (naturalistic) school.

This conclusion will be submitted to detailed verification in the next article. It is now time to close. I shall only, before doing so, say another word or two about Pushkin.

When his poet abuses the "rabble," we hear much anger in his words but no vulgarity, whatever Pisarev may have said on the point.³² The poet accuses the aristocratic crowd—precisely the aristocratic crowd, and not the real people, who at that time were entirely outside the purview of Russian literature—of settling higher store on a cooking pot than on Apollo Belvedere. This only means that their narrow practical spirit is intolerable to him. Nothing more. His resolute refusal to instruct the crowd only testifies that in his opinion they were entirely beyond redemption. But in this opinion there is not the slightest tinge of reaction. That is where Pushkin is immensely superior to believers in art for art's sake like Gautier. This superiority is conditional. Pushkin did not jeer at the Saint-Simonists. But he probably never heard of them.³³ He was an honest and generous soul. But this honest and generous soul had absorbed certain class prejudices from

childhood. Abolition of the exploitation of one class by another must have seemed to him an impracticable and even ridiculous utopia. If he had heard of any practical plans for its abolition, and especially if these plans had caused such a stir in Russia as the Saint-Simonian plans had in France, he would have campaigned against them in violent polemical articles and sarcastic epigrams. Some of his remarks (in the article, "Thoughts on the Road") concerning the superior position of the Russian peasant serf compared with that of the West-European worker lead one to think that in this case Pushkin, who was a man of sagacity, might have argued almost as unintelligently as Gautier, who was infinitely less sagacious. He was saved from this weakness by Russia's economic backwardness.

This is an old, but eternally new story. When a class lives by exploiting another class which is below it in the economic scale, and when it has attained full mastery in society, from then on its *forward movement* is a *downward movement*. Therein lies the explanation of the fact, which at a first glance seems incomprehensible and even incredible, that the ideology of the ruling classes in economically backward countries is often far superior to that of the ruling classes in advanced countries.

Russia, too, has now reached that level of economic development at which believers in the theory of art for art's sake become conscious defenders of a social order based on the exploitation of one class by another. In our country too, therefore, a great deal of social-reactionary nonsense is now being uttered in support of the "absolute autonomy of art." But this was not yet so in Pushkin's time. And that was his supreme good fortune.



III



I have already said that there is no such thing as a work of art which is entirely devoid of ideas. And I added that not every idea can serve as the foundation of a work of art. An artist can be really inspired only by what is capable of facilitating intercourse among men. The possible limits of such intercourse are not determined by the artist, but by the level of culture attained by the social entity to which he belongs. But in a society divided into classes, they are also determined by the mutual relations of these classes and, moreover, by the phase of development in which each of them happens to be at the time. When the bourgeoisie was still striving to throw off the ægis of the lay and spiritual aristocracy, that is, when it was itself a revolutionary class, it was the leader of all the working masses, and together with them constituted a single "third" estate. And at that time the foremost ideologists of the bourgeoisie were also the foremost ideologists of "the whole nation, with the exception of the privileged." In other words, at that time the limits of that intercourse of which artistic production that adhered to the bourgeois standpoint served as the medium, were relatively very wide. But when the interests of the

bourgeoisie ceased to be the interests of all the labouring masses, and especially when they came into conflict with the interests of the proletariat, then the limits of this intercourse considerably contracted. If Ruskin said that a miser cannot sing of his lost money, now a time has come when the mental attitude of the bourgeoisie begins to approximate to that of a miser mourning over his treasure. The only difference is that the miser mourns over something already lost, while the bourgeoisie loses its equanimity at the thought of the loss that menaces it in the future. "Oppression (of others) maketh a wise man mad," I would say in the words of Ecclesiastes. And a wise man (even a wise man!) may be affected in the same pernicious way by the fear that he may lose the possibility of oppressing others. The ideology of a ruling class loses its inherent value as that class ripens for doom. The art engendered by its emotional experience falls into decay. The purpose of this article is to supplement what was said in the previous article with an examination of some of the most vivid symptoms of the present decay of bourgeois art.

We have seen the reason for the mystical trend in contemporary French literature. It is due to the realization of the impossibility of form without content, that is, without idea, coupled with an inability to rise to an understanding of the great emancipatory ideas of our time. This realization and this inability have led to many other consequences which, no less than mysticism, lower the inherent value of artistic productions.

Mysticism is implacably hostile to reason. But it is not only he who succumbs to mysticism that is at enmity with reason; so is he who, from one cause or another and in one way or another, defends a false idea. And when a false idea is made the basis of an artistic work, it imparts to it inherent contradictions that inevitably detract from its esthetic merit.

I have already had occasion to refer to Knut Hamsun's

play, *The Gate of the Kingdom*, as an example of an artistic work that suffers from the falsity of its basic idea.*

The reader will forgive me if I refer to it again.

The hero of this play is Ivar Kareno, a young writer who, if not talented, is at any rate preposterously self-conceited. He calls himself a man "whose thoughts are as free as a bird." And what does this thinker who is as free as a bird write about? About "resistance," and about "hate." And who, in his opinion, must be resisted, and who hated? It is the proletariat, he advises, that must be resisted, and the proletariat that must be hated. This, surely, is a hero of the very latest type. So far we have met very few—not to say none at all—of his kind in literature. But a man who preaches resistance to the proletariat is a most unquestionable ideologist of the bourgeoisie. The ideologist of the bourgeoisie named Ivar Kareno seems in his own eyes and in those of his creator, Knut Hamsun, a terrific revolutionist. We have learned from the example of the early French realists that there are "revolutionary" attitudes of mind whose chief distinguishing feature is conservatism. Theophile Gautier hated the "bourgeois," yet he fulminated against people who affirmed that the time had come to abolish the bourgeois social relationships. Ivar Kareno, evidently, is a spiritual descendant of the famous French romanticist. But the descendant goes much further than his ancestor. He is consciously hostile to that for which his ancestor felt only an instinctive dislike.**

* See the article "Dr. Stockmann's Son" in my *From Defence to Attack*.

** I am speaking of the time when Gautier had not yet worn out his celebrated red waistcoat. Later—at the time of the Paris Commune, for instance—he was already a conscious—and very bitter—enemy of the emancipation movement of the working class. It should be observed, however, that Flaubert might likewise be called an ideological forerunner of Knut Hamsun, and even, perhaps, with greater right. In one of his notebooks we find the following significant lines: "Ce n'est pas contre Dieu que Prométhée

If the romanticists were conservatives, Ivar Kareno is a reactionary of the purest water. And, moreover, a utopian of the type of Shchedrin's wild landlord.³⁴ He wants to exterminate the proletariat, just as the latter wanted to exterminate the muzhik. This utopianism is carried to the most comical extremes. And, generally speaking, all Ivar Kareno's thoughts that are "as free as a bird" go to the height of absurdity. To him, the proletariat is a class

aujourd'hui devrait se révolter, mais contre le Peuple, dieu nouveau. Aux vieilles tyrannies sacerdotales, féodales et monarchiques, en a succédé une autre, plus subtile, inextricable, impérieuse et qui dans quelque temps ne laissera pas un seul coin de la terre qui soit libre." ["It is not against God that Prometheus would have to revolt today, but against the People, the new god. The old sacerdotal, feudal and monarchical tyrannies have been succeeded by another, more subtle, enigmatic and imperious, and one that soon will not leave a single free corner on the earth."] See the chapter, "Les carnets de Gustave Flaubert" in Louis Bertrand's *Gustave Flaubert*, Paris, 1912, p. 255.

This is just the sort of free-as-a-bird thinking that inspires Ivar Kareno. In a letter to George Sand dated September 8, 1871, Flaubert says: "Je crois que la foule, le troupeau sera toujours haïssable. Il n'y a d'important qu'un petit groupe d'esprits toujours les mêmes et qui se repassent le flambeau." ["I believe that the crowd, the herd, will always be detestable. Nothing is important but a small group of always the same minds who pass on the torch to one another."] This letter also contains the lines I have already quoted to the effect that universal suffrage is a disgrace to the human mind, since because of it number dominates "even over money!" (See Flaubert, *Correspondance, quatrième série (1869-1880)*, huitième mille, Paris, 1910.) Ivar Kareno would probably recognize in these views his own free-as-a-bird thoughts. But these views were not reflected in Flaubert's novels *directly*. The class struggle in modern society had to advance much further before the ideologists of the ruling class felt the need to give outright expression in literature to their hatred for the emancipatory ambitions of the "people." But those who eventually conceived this need could no longer advocate the "absolute autonomy" of ideologies. On the contrary, they demanded that ideologies should consciously serve as intellectual weapons in the struggle against the proletariat. But of this later.

which exploits other classes of society. This is the most erroneous of all Kareno's free-as-a-bird thoughts. And the misfortune is that Knut Hamsun apparently shares this erroneous thought of his hero. His Ivar Kareno suffers so many misadventures precisely because he hates the proletariat and "resists" it. It is because of this that he is unable to obtain a professorial chair, or even publish his book. In brief, he incurs the persecution of the *bourgeois* among whom he lives and acts. But in what part of the world, in what utopia, is there a bourgeoisie which exacts such inexorable vengeance for "resistance" to the proletariat? There never has been such a bourgeoisie, and never will be. Knut Hamsun based his play on an idea which is in irreconcilable contradiction to reality. And this has vitiated the play to such an extent that it evokes laughter precisely in those places where the author intended the action to be tragic.

Knut Hamsun is highly talented. But no talent can convert into truth that which is its very opposite. The grave defects of his play are a natural consequence of the utter unsoundness of its basic idea. And its unsoundness springs from the author's inability to understand the struggle of classes in present-day society of which his play is a literary echo.

Knut Hamsun is not a Frenchman. But this makes no difference. The *Communist Manifesto* had pointed out very aptly that in civilized countries, owing to the development of capitalism, "national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature." True, Hamsun was born and brought up in a West-European country that is far from being one of the most developed economically. This, of course, explains why his conception of the position of the embattled proletariat in contemporary society is so childishly naive. But the economic backwardness of his country has not prevented him from conceiving that hatred

for the working class and that sympathy for the struggle against it which arise naturally among the bourgeois intellectuals of the more advanced countries. Ivar Kæreno is only a variety of the Nietzschean type. And what is Nietzscheanism? It is a new edition, revised and supplemented in response to the demands of modern capitalism, of that already familiar hostility to the "bourgeois" which cohabits in such perfect harmony with an unshakeable sympathy for the bourgeois system. We could easily substitute for the example of Hamsun one borrowed from contemporary French literature.

Undoubtedly, one of the most talented and—what is even more important in this case—one of the most thoughtful dramatists of present-day France is François de Curel. And of his dramas, the one that without the slightest hesitation may be considered the most worthy of note is the five-act play, *Le repas du lion*, which as far as I know has received little notice from Russian critics. The chief character of this play is Jean de Sancy. Under the influence of certain exceptional circumstances of his childhood, he is carried away at one time by Christian socialism, but later violently rejects it and becomes an eloquent advocate of large-scale capitalist production. In the third scene of the fourth act, he delivers a long harangue to some workers in which he seeks to persuade them that "egotism which engages in production (*l'égoïsme qui produit*) is for the labouring multitude what charity is for the poor." And as his auditors voice their disagreement with this view, he gets more and more excited and tries to explain the role of the capitalist and his workers in modern industry with the help of a graphic and picturesque comparison.

"They say," he thunders, "that a horde of jackals follow the lion in the desert to enjoy the remains of his prey. Too weak to attack a buffalo, too slow to run down a gazelle, all their hope is fastened on the claws of the king of the desert. You hear—on his claws! When twilight falls

he leaves his den and runs, roaring with hunger, to seek his prey. Here it is! He makes a mighty bound, a fierce battle ensues, a mortal struggle, and the earth is covered with blood, which is not always the blood of the victim. Then the regal feast, which the jackals watch with attention and respect. When the lion is satiated, it is the turn of the jackals to dine. Do you think they would have more to eat if the lion divided his prey equally with each of them, leaving only a small portion for himself? Not at all! Such a kind-hearted lion would cease to be a lion; he would hardly be fit for the role of a blind man's dog. At the first groan of his prey, he would refrain from killing it and begin licking its wounds instead. A lion is good only as a savage beast, ravenous for prey, eager only to kill and shed blood. When such a lion roars, the jackals lick their chops in expectation."

Clear as this parable is, the eloquent orator explains its moral in the following, much briefer, but equally expressive words: "The employer opens up the nourishing springs whose spray falls upon the workers."

I know that an artist cannot be held responsible for the statements of his heroes. But very often he in one way or another indicates his own attitude to these statements, and we are thus able to judge what his own views are. The whole subsequent course of *Le repas du lion* shows that Curel himself considers that Jean de Sancy is perfectly right in comparing the employer to a lion, and the workers to jackals. It is quite evident that he might with full conviction repeat the words of his hero: "I believe in the lion. I bow before the rights which his claws give him." He himself is prepared to regard the workers as jackals who feed on the leavings of what the capitalist secures by his labour. To him, as to Jean de Sancy, the struggle of the workers against the capitalist is a struggle of envious jackals against a mighty lion. This comparison is, in fact, the fundamental idea of his play, with which the fate of his principal character is linked. But

there is not an atom of truth in this idea. It misrepresents the character of the social relationships of contemporary society far more than did the economic sophistries of Bastiat and all his numerous followers, up to and including Böhm-Bawerk. The jackals do absolutely nothing to secure the lion's food, part of which goes to satisfy their own hunger. But who will venture to say that the workers employed in any given factory contribute nothing to the creation of its product? It is by their labour, obviously, that it is created, all economic sophistries notwithstanding. True, the employer participates in the process of production as its organizer. And as an organizer, he is himself a worker. But, again, everybody knows that the salary of a factory manager is one thing, and the entrepreneur profit of the factory-owner quite another. Deducting the salary from the profit, we get a balance which goes to the share of capital as such. The whole question is, why does capital get this balance? And to this question there is not even a hint of an answer in the eloquent disquisitions of Jean de Sancy—who, incidentally, does not even suspect that his own income as a big shareholder in the business would not have been justified even if his absolutely false comparison of the entrepreneur to a lion, and the workers to jackals, had been correct: he himself does absolutely nothing for the business and is content with receiving a big income from it annually. And if anybody resembles a jackal who feeds on what is obtained by the effort of others, it is the shareholder, whose work consists solely in looking after his shares, and also the ideologist of the bourgeois system, who does not participate in production himself, but lives on what is left over from the luxurious banquet of capital. With all his talent, de Curel, unfortunately, himself belongs to this category of ideologists. In the struggle of the wage-workers against the capitalists, he unreservedly takes the side of the latter

and gives an absolutely false picture of their real attitude toward those whom they exploit.

And what is Bourget's play, *La barricade*, but the appeal of a well-known and, undoubtedly, also talented artist to the bourgeoisie, urging all the members of this class to unite against the proletariat? Bourgeois art is becoming belligerent. Its exponents can no longer say of themselves that they were not born for "agitation and strife." No, they are eager for strife, and do not shun the agitation that goes with it. But what is it waged for—this strife in which they are anxious to take part? Alas, for the sake of self-interest. Not, it is true, for their own personal self-interest—it would be strange to affirm that men like de Curel or Bourget defend capitalism in the hope of personal enrichment. The self-interest which "agitates" them, and for which they are eager to engage in "strife," is the self-interest of a whole class. But it is none the less self-interest. And if this is so, just see what we get.

Why did the romanticists despise the "bourgeois" of their time? We already know why: because the "bourgeois," in the words of Theodore de Banville, prized the five-franc piece above all else. And what do artists like de Curel, Bourget and Hamsun defend in their writings? Those social relationships which are a plentiful source of five-franc pieces for the bourgeoisie. How remote these artists are from the romanticism of the good old days! And what has made them so remote from it? Nothing but the inadvertible march of social development. The acuter the inherent contradictions of the capitalist mode of production became, the harder it was for artists who remained faithful to the bourgeois manner of thought to cling to the theory of art for art's sake—and to live, as the French term has it, shut up in an ivory tower (*tour d'ivoire*).

There is not, I think, a single country in the modern civilized world where the bourgeois youth is not sympa-

thetic to the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche, perhaps, despised his "sleepy" (schläfrigen) contemporaries even more than Theophile Gautier despised the "bourgeois" of his time. But what, in Nietzsche's eyes, was wrong with his "sleepy" contemporaries? What was their principal defect, the source of all the others? It was that they could not think, feel and—chiefly—act as befits people who hold the predominant position in society. In the present historical conditions, this is tantamount to the reproach that they did not display sufficient energy and consistency in defending the bourgeois order against the revolutionary attacks of the proletariat. Witness the anger with which Nietzsche spoke of the Socialists. But, again, see what we get.

If Pushkin and the romanticists of his time rebuked the "crowd" for setting too much store on the cooking pot, the inspirers of the present neo-romanticists rebuke the "crowd" for being too sluggish in defending it, that is, in not setting sufficient store on it. Yet the neo-romanticists also proclaim, like the romanticists of the good old days, the absolute autonomy of art. But can one seriously call art autonomous when it consciously sets itself the aim of defending the existing social relationships? Of course, not. Such art is undoubtedly utilitarian. And if its exponents despise creative work that is guided by utilitarian considerations, this is simply a misunderstanding. And indeed—leaving aside considerations of personal benefit, which can never be paramount in the eyes of a man who is genuinely devoted to art—to them only such considerations are intolerable as envisage the benefit of the exploited majority. As to the benefit of the exploiting minority, for them it is a supreme law. Thus the attitude, say, of Knut Hamsun or François de Curel to the utilitarian principle in art is, actually speaking, the very opposite of that of Theophile Gautier or Flaubert, although the latter, as we know, were not devoid of conservative prejudices either. But since the time of Gautier

and Flaubert, these prejudices, owing to the greater acuteness of the social contradictions, have become so strongly developed in artists who hold to the bourgeois standpoint that it is now incomparably more difficult for them to adhere to the theory of art for art's sake. Of course, it would be a great mistake to imagine that none of them nowadays adheres to this theory consistently. But, as we shall soon see, this consistency is now maintained at a very heavy cost.

The neo-romanticists—also under the influence of Nietzsche—fondly imagine that they stand “beyond good and evil.” But what does standing beyond good and evil mean? It means doing a great historical work which cannot be judged within the framework of the existing concepts of good and evil, those springing from the existing social order. The French revolutionaries of 1793, in their struggle against reaction, undoubtedly did stand beyond good and evil, that is, their activities were in contradiction to the concepts of good and evil which had sprung from the old and moribund order. Such a contradiction, in which there is always a great deal of tragedy, can only be justified on the ground that the activities of revolutionaries who are temporarily compelled to stand beyond good and evil have the result that evil retreats before good in social life. In order to take the Bastille, its defenders had to be fought. And whoever wages such a fight must inevitably for the time being take his stand beyond good and evil. And to the extent that the capture of the Bastille curbed the tyranny which could send people to prison “at its good pleasure” (“parce que tel est notre bon plaisir”*)—the well-known expression of the French absolute monarchs), to that extent it compelled evil to retreat before good in the social life of France, thereby justifying the stand beyond good and evil temporarily assumed by those who were fighting tyranny. But such a

* [“For such is our good pleasure.”]

justification cannot be found for all who take their stand beyond good and evil. Ivar Kareno, for example, would probably not hesitate for a moment to go beyond good and evil for the sake of realizing his thoughts that are "as free as a bird." But, as we know, his thoughts amount, in sum, to waging an implacable struggle against the emancipation movement of the proletariat. For him, therefore, going beyond good and evil would mean not being deterred in this struggle even by the few rights which the working class has succeeded in winning in bourgeois society. And if his struggle were successful, its effect would be not to diminish, but to increase the evil in social life. In his case, therefore, going beyond good and evil would be devoid of all justification, as it generally is when it is done for the furtherance of reactionary aims. It may be argued in objection that although Ivar Kareno could find no justification from the standpoint of the proletariat, he certainly would find justification from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie. I fully agree. But the standpoint of the bourgeoisie is in this case the standpoint of a privileged minority which is anxious to perpetuate its privileges. The standpoint of the proletariat, on the other hand, is that of a majority which demands the abolition of all privileges. Hence, to say that the activity of a particular person is justifiable from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie, is to say that they are condemnable from the standpoint of all people who are not inclined to defend the interests of exploiters. And that is all I need, for the inevitable march of economic development is my guarantee that the number of such people will most certainly grow larger and larger.

Hating the "sleepers" from the bottom of their hearts, the neo-romanticists want movement. But the movement they desire is a *protective* movement, the very opposite of the *emancipation* movement of our time. This is the whole secret of their psychology. It is also the secret of the fact that even the most talented of them cannot pro-

duce the significant works they would have produced if their social sympathies ran in a different direction, and if their attitude of mind were different. We have already seen how erroneous is the idea on which de Curel based his play, *Le repas du lion*. And a false idea is bound to injure an artistic work, since it gives a false twist to the psychology of its characters. It would not be difficult to demonstrate how much falsity there is in the psychology of the principal hero of this play, Jean de Sancy. But this would compel me to make a much longer digression than the plan of my article warrants. I shall take another example which will permit me to be more brief.

The basic idea of the play, *La barricade*, is that everyone must participate in the modern class struggle on the side of his own class. But whom does Bourget consider the "most likeable figure" in his play? An old worker named Gaucherond,* who sides not with the workers, but with the employer. The behaviour of this worker fundamentally contradicts the basic idea of the play, and he may seem likeable only to those who are absolutely blinded by sympathy for the bourgeoisie. The sentiment which guides Gaucherond is that of a slave who reveres his chains. And we already know from the time of Count Alexei Tolstoi that it is hard to evoke sympathy for the devotion of a slave in anyone who has not been educated in the spirit of slavery. Remember Vasily Shibanov, who so wonderfully preserved his "slavish fidelity."³⁵ Despite terrible torture, he died a hero:

Tsar, for ever the same is his word:

He does naught but sing the praise of his lord.

But this slavish heroism has but a cold appeal to the modern reader, who probably cannot even conceive how it is possible for a "vocal tool"³⁶ to display such devoted loyalty to his owner. Yet old Gaucherond in Bourget's

* He says so himself. See *La barricade*, Paris, 1910, Preface, p. xix.

play is a sort of Vasily Shibanov transformed from a serf into a modern proletarian. One must be purblind indeed to call him the "most likeable figure" in the play. And one thing is certain at any rate: if Gaucherond really is likeable, then it shows that, Bourget to the contrary, each of us must side not with the class to which he belongs, but with that whose cause he considers more just.

Bourget's creation contradicts his own idea. And this is for the same reason that a wise man who oppresses others becomes mad. When a talented artist is inspired by a wrong idea, he spoils his own production. And the modern artist cannot be inspired by a right idea if he is anxious to defend the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the proletariat.

I have said that it is incomparably harder than formerly for an artist who holds to the bourgeois standpoint to adhere consistently to the theory of art for art's sake. This, incidentally, is admitted by Bourget himself. He even puts it far more emphatically. "The role of an indifferent chronicler," he says, "is impossible for a thinking mind and a sensitive heart when it is a case of those terrible internecine wars on which, it sometimes seems, the whole future of one's country and of civilization depends."* But here it is appropriate to make a reservation. It is indeed true that a man with a thinking mind and a responsive heart cannot remain an indifferent observer of the civil war going on in modern society. If his field of vision is narrowed by bourgeois prejudices, he will be on one side of the "barricade"; if he is not infected with these prejudices, he will be on the other. That is true. But not all the children of the bourgeoisie—or of any other class, of course—possess thinking minds. And those who do think, do not always have responsive hearts. For them, it is easy even now to remain consistent believers in the theory of art for art's sake. It eminently accords with in-

* *La barricade*, Preface, p. xxiv.

difference to social—and even narrow class—interests. And the bourgeois social system is perhaps more capable than any other of engendering such indifference. When whole generations are educated in the celebrated principle of each for himself and the devil take the hindmost, the appearance of egotists who think only of themselves and are interested only in themselves, is very natural. And we do, in fact, find that such egotists are more frequently to be met with among the present-day bourgeoisie than perhaps at any other time. On this point we have the very valuable testimony of one of its most prominent ideologists: Maurice Barrès.

“Our morality, our religion, our national sentiment have all gone to pieces,” he says. “No rules of life can be borrowed from them. And until such time as our teachers establish authentic truths, there is naught we can do but cling to the only reality, our ego.”*

When in the eyes of a man all has “fallen to pieces” save his own ego, then there is nothing to prevent him from acting as a calm chronicler of the great war raging in the bosom of modern society. But, no! Even then there is something to prevent him doing so. This something will be precisely that lack of all social interest which is vividly described in the lines of Barrès I have quoted. Why should a man act as a chronicler of the social struggle when he has not the slightest interest either in the struggle, or in society? He will be irresistibly bored by everything connected with the struggle. And if he is an artist, he will not even hint at it in his works. In them, too, he will be concerned with the “only reality”—his ego. And as his ego may nevertheless be bored when it has no company but itself, he will invent for it a fantastic, transcendental world, a world standing high above the earth and all earthly “questions.” And that is what many present-day artists do. I am not labelling them. They say

* *Sous l'œil des barbares*, 1901 ed., p. 18.

so themselves. Here, for example, is what our countrywoman, Mrs. Zinaida Hippus, says:

"I consider that a natural and most essential need of human nature is prayer. Everyone most certainly prays or strives to pray—whether he is conscious of it or not, whatever the form his praying may take, and to whatever god it may be addressed. The form depends on the abilities and inclinations of each. Poesy in general, and versifying—verbal music—in particular, is only one of the forms prayer takes in our hearts."*

This identification of "verbal music" with prayer is of course utterly untenable. There have been very long periods in the history of poetry when it bore no relation whatever to prayer. But there is no necessity to argue this point. It is only important for me here to acquaint the reader with Mrs. Hippus's terminology, for unless he is acquainted with it, he might be rather perplexed on reading the following passages, which are important for us in substance.

Mrs. Hippus continues: "Are we to blame that every ego has now become separate, lonely and isolated from every other ego, and therefore incomprehensible and unnecessary to it? We all of us passionately need, understand and prize our prayer, our verse—the reflection of an instantaneous fullness of the heart. But to another, whose cherished ego is different, my prayer is incomprehensible and alien. The consciousness of loneliness isolates people from one another still more, makes them separate, compels them to lock their hearts. We are ashamed of our prayers, and knowing that all the same we shall not merge in them with anyone, we say them, compose them, in a whisper, to ourselves, in hints that are clear only to ourselves."**

When individualism is carried to such an extreme, then, indeed, as Mrs. Hippus quite rightly says, there is no

* *Collected Verse*, Preface, p. ii.

** *Ibid.*, p. iii.

longer any "possibility of communication through prayer (that is, poetry—*G.P.*), of community in prayerful (that is, poetical—*G.P.*) impulse." But this cannot but reflect detrimentally on poetry and art in general, which is one of the media through which people communicate with one another. It was already observed by the biblical Jehovah that it is not good that man should be alone. And this is eminently corroborated by the example of Mrs. Hippius herself. In one of her poems, we read:

'Tis a merciless road I must plod.
On and on unto death it will roll.
But I love myself as my God,
And that love, it will save my soul.

We may well doubt that. Who "loves himself as God"? A boundless egotist. And a boundless egotist is scarcely capable of saving anyone's soul.

But the point is not whether the souls of Mrs. Hippius and of all who, like her, "love themselves as God" will be saved or not. The point is that poets who love themselves as God can have no interest in what is going on in the society around them. Their ambitions must of necessity be extremely vague. In her poem, *A Song*, Mrs. Hippius "sings":

Alas, in the madness of sorrow I perish,
I perish,
'Tis a dream of I know not what that I cherish,
I cherish,
This desire has arisen I know not where from,
Where from,
Yet my heart still yearns for a mircale to come,
To come.
Oh that there might befall which never can be,
Never can be!
The cold, pallid skies promise wonders to me,
To me,
Yet I mourn without tears for the broken word,
The broken word.
Give me that which in this world is not,
Is not, O Lord!

This puts it quite neatly. A person who "loves himself as God," and has lost all capacity of communication with other people, has nothing left but to "yearn for a miracle" and to long for that "which in this world is not"—for what is in this world cannot interest him. Sergeyev-Tsensky's Lieutenant Babayev³⁷ says that "art is a product of anaemia." This philosophizing son of Mars is seriously mistaken if he believes that *all* art is a product of anaemia. But it cannot be denied that it is anaemia that produces the art which yearns for what "in this world is not." This art is characteristic of the decay of a whole system of social relationships, and is therefore quite aptly called decadent art.

True, the system of social relationships of whose decay this art is characteristic, that is, the system of capitalist relations of production, is still far from having decayed in our own country. In Russia, capitalism has not yet completely gained the upper hand over the old order. But since the time of Peter I Russian literature has been very strongly influenced by West-European literatures. Not infrequently, therefore, it is invaded by trends which fully correspond to the West-European social relationships and much less to the relatively backward relationships of Russia. There was a time when some of our aristocrats had an infatuation for the doctrines of the Encyclopaedists,* which corresponded to one of the last phases in the struggle of the third estate against the aristocracy in France. Now a time has come when many of our "intellectuals" conceive an infatuation for social, philosophical and esthetic doctrines which correspond to the era of decay of the West-European bourgeoisie. This infatuation anticipates the course of our own social development in the same

* We know, for instance, that the work of Helvetius, *De l'Homme*, was published in The Hague, in 1772, by a Prince Golitsyn.

way as it was anticipated by the infatuation of 18th-century people for the theory of the Encyclopaedists.*

But if the appearance of Russian decadence cannot be adequately explained, so to speak, by domestic causes, this fact in no way alters its nature. Introduced into our country from the West, it does not cease to be what it was at home, namely, a product of the "anaemia" that accompanies the decay of the class now predominant in Western Europe.

Mrs. Hippius will probably say that I quite arbitrarily ascribe to her a complete indifference to social questions. But, in the first place, I ascribe nothing to her; I cite her own lyrical effusions, and only define their significance. Whether I have understood these effusions rightly or not, I leave it to the reader to judge. In the second place, I am aware of course that nowadays Mrs. Hippius is not averse to discoursing even on the social movement. The book, for instance, which she wrote in collaboration with Mr. Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Mr. Dmitry Filosofov and published in Germany in 1908, might serve as convincing evidence of her interest in the Russian social movement. But one has only to read the introduction to the book to see how extreme is the yearning of its

* The infatuation of Russian aristocrats for the French Encyclopaedists had no consequences of any moment. It was however *useful* in the sense that it did clear certain aristocratic minds of some aristocratic prejudices. On the other hand, the present infatuation of a section of our intelligentsia for the philosophical opinions and esthetic tastes of the declining bourgeoisie is *harmful*, in the sense that it fills their "intellectual" minds with bourgeois prejudices, for the independent production of which our Russian soil has not yet been sufficiently prepared by the course of social development. These prejudices even invade the minds of many Russians who sympathize with the proletarian movement. The result is that they are filled with an astonishing mixture of socialism and that modernism which is bred by the decline of the bourgeoisie. This confusion is even the cause of no little practical harm.

authors for "they know not what." It says that Europe is familiar with the deeds of the Russian revolution, but not with its soul. And in order, presumably, to acquaint Europe with the soul of the Russian revolution, the authors tell the Europeans the following: "We resemble you as the left hand resembles the right. . . . We are equal with you, but only in the reverse sense. . . . Kant would have said that our soul lies in the transcendental, and yours in the phenomenal. Nietzsche would have said that you are ruled by Apollo, and we by Dionysus; your genius consists in moderation, ours in impulsiveness. You are able to check yourselves in time; if you come up against a wall, you stop or go round it; we, however, dash our heads against it (wir rennen uns aber die Köpfe ein). It is not easy for us to get going, but once we have, we cannot stop. We do not walk, we run. We do not run, we fly. We do not fly, we plunge downwards. You are fond of the golden mean; we are fond of extremes. You are just; for us there are no laws. You are able to retain your equanimity; we are always striving to lose it. You possess the kingdom of the present; we seek the kingdom of the future. You, in the final analysis, always place government authority higher than the liberties you may secure. We, on the other hand, remain rebels and anarchists even when fettered in the chains of slavery. Reason and emotion lead us to the extreme limit of negation, yet, despite this, deep down at the bottom of our being and will, we remain mystics."*

The Europeans further learn that the Russian revolution is as absolute as the form of government against which it is directed, and that if its conscious empirical aim is socialism, its unconscious mystical aim is anarchy.** In conclusion, the authors declare that they are

* Dmitri Mereschkowsky, Zinaida Hippus, Dmitri Philosophoff, *Der Zar und die Revolution*, Munich, K. Piper and Co., 1908, pp. 1-2.

** Ibid., p. 5.

addressing themselves not to the European bourgeoisie, but—to whom, reader? To the proletariat, you think? You are mistaken. “Only to individual minds of the universal culture, to people who share Nietzsche’s view that the state is the coldest of cold monsters,” etc.*

I have not cited these passages for polemical reasons. Generally, I am not here indulging in polemics, but only trying to characterize and explain certain mental attitudes of certain social strata. The quotations I have just given are, I hope, sufficient to show that Mrs. Hippius, now that she has (at last!) become interested in social questions, still remains exactly as she appeared to us in the poems cited above, namely, an extreme individualist of the decadent type who yearns for a “miracle” only because she has no serious attitude to real social life. The reader has not forgotten Leconte de Lisle’s idea that poetry now provides an ideal life for those who no longer have a real life. And when a man ceases to have any spiritual intercourse with the people around him, his ideal life loses all connection with the earth. His imagination then carries him to heaven, he becomes a mystic. Thoroughly permeated with mysticism, Mrs. Hippius’s interest in social questions is absolutely fruitless.** But she and her collaborators are quite mistaken in thinking that the yearning for a “miracle” and the “mystical” negation of “politics as a science” are a feature peculiar to the Russian decadents.*** The “sober” West, before “inebriate”

* Ibid., p. 6.

** In their German book, Merezhkovsky, Hippius and Filosofov do not at all repudiate the name “decadents” as applied to themselves. They only confine themselves to modestly informing Europe that the Russian decadents have “attained the highest peaks of world culture” (“haben die höchsten Gipfel der Weltkultur erreicht”). Op. cit., p. 151.

*** Her mystical anarchism will of course not frighten anyone. Anarchism, generally, is only an extreme deduction from the basic premises of bourgeois idealism. That is why we find so

Russia, produced people who revolt against reason in the name of an irrational grandeur. Przybyszewski's Eric Falk³⁸ abuses the Social-Democrats and "drawing-room anarchists like John Henry Mackay" solely because, as he claims, they put too much faith in reason.

"They all," declares this non-Russian decadent, "preach peaceful revolution, the changing of the broken wheel while the cart is in motion. Their whole dogmatic structure is idiotically stupid just because it is so logical, for it is based on almighty reason. But up to now everything has taken place not by virtue of reason, but of foolishness, of meaningless chance."

Falk's reference to "foolishness" and "meaningless chance" is exactly of the same nature as the yearning for a "miracle" which permeates the German book of Mrs. Hippus and Messrs. Merezhkovsky and Filosofov. It is one and the same thought posing under different names. It owes its origin to the extreme subjectivity of a large section of the present-day bourgeois intellectuals. When a man believes that his own ego is the only "reality," he cannot admit the existence of an objective, "rational," that is, logical connection between his ego and the outer world around him. To him, the outer world must be either entirely unreal, or only partly real, only to the extent that its existence rests upon the only true reality, that

many bourgeois ideologists in the period of decadence who are sympathetic to anarchism. Maurice Barrès likewise sympathized with anarchism in that period of his development when he affirmed that there is no reality save our ego. Now, probably, he has no *conscious* sympathy for anarchism, for the ostensibly stormy outbursts of his particular brand of individualism have ceased long ago. For him, the "authentic truths" which, he maintained, were "destroyed" have now been restored, the process of restoration being that Barrès has adopted the reactionary standpoint of the most vulgar nationalism. And this is not surprising: it is but a step from extreme bourgeois idealism to the most reactionary "truths." This should be noted by Mrs. Hippus, as well as by Messrs. Merezhkovsky and Filosofov

is, his ego. If such a man is fond of philosophical cogitation, he will say that, in creating the outer world, our ego imparts to it at least some modicum of its own rationality; a philosopher cannot completely revolt against reason even when he restricts its rights from one or other motive—in the interest of religion, for example.* If a man who believes that the only reality is his own ego is not given to philosophical cogitation, he does not bother his head as to how his ego creates the outer world. In that case he will not be inclined to presume even a modicum of reason—that is, of law—in the outer world. On the contrary, the world will seem to him a realm of “meaningless chance.” And if it should occur to him to sympathize with any great social movement, he, like Falk, will certainly say that its success can be ensured not by the natural march of social development, but only by human “foolishness,” or—which is one and the same thing—by “meaningless” historical “chance.” But as I have already said, the mystical view of the Russian emancipation movement held by Hippus and her two like-thinkers in no way differs, essentially, from Falk’s view that the causes of great historical events are “meaningless.” Although anxious to stagger Europe with the unparalleled immensity of the freedom-loving ambitions of the Russians, the authors of the German book I have referred to are decads of the purest water, who are capable of feeling sympathy only with “that which never can be, never can be”—in other words, are incapable of feeling sympathy with anything which occurs in reality. Their mystical

* As an example of a thinker who restricts the rights of reason in the interest of religion, one might instance Kant: “Ich musste also das *Wissen* aufheben, um zum *Glaube* Platz zu bekommen.” [“I therefore had to abolish *Knowledge* in order to make room for *Faith*.”] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Preface to Second Edition, p. 26, Leipzig, Philipp Reclam, second and improved edition.

anarchism, therefore, does not weaken the validity of the conclusions I drew from Mrs. Hippus's lyrical effusions.

Since I have touched upon this point, I shall express my thought without reservation. The events of 1905-06 produced just as strong an impression on the Russian decadents as the events of 1848-49 did on the French romanticists. They awoke in them an interest in social life. But this interest was less suited to the temperament of the decadents than it had been to the temperament of the romanticists. It therefore proved less durable. And there are no grounds for taking it seriously.

Let us return to modern art. When a man is disposed to regard his ego as the only reality, he, like Mrs. Hippus, "loves himself as God." This is fully understandable and quite inevitable. And when a man "loves himself as God," he will be concerned in his artistic productions solely with himself. The outer world will interest him only to the extent that it in one way or another affects this "sole reality," this precious ego of his. In Scene I Act II of Sudermann's interesting play, *Das Blumenboot*, Baroness Erfflingen says to her daughter Thea: "People of our category exist in order to make the things of this world into a sort of merry panorama which passes before us—or, rather, which *seems* to pass before us. Because, actually, it is we that are moving. That's certain. And what is more, we don't need any ballast." These words perfectly describe the life aim of people of Baroness Erfflingen's category; they could with complete conviction reiterate the words of Barrès: "The only reality is our ego." But people who pursue this life aim must look upon art solely as a means of enlivening the panorama which "*seems*" to be passing before us. And here, too, they will try not to be burdened with any ballast. They will either completely scorn idea content in artistic works, or will subordinate it to the caprices and fickle demands of their extreme subjectiveness.

Let us turn to painting.

Complete indifference to the idea content of their works was already displayed by the impressionists. One of them very aptly expressed the conviction of them all when he said: "The chief *dramatis persona* in a picture is light." But the sensation of light is only a sensation—that is, it is not *yet* emotion, and not *yet* thought. An artist who confines his attention to the realm of sensations is indifferent to emotion and thought. He may paint a good landscape. And the impressionists did, in fact, paint many excellent landscapes. But landscape is not the whole of painting.* Let us recall Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* and ask, is light the chief *dramatis persona* in this famous fresco? We know that its subject is that terrifically dramatic moment in the relations of Jesus to his disciples when he says: "One of you shall betray me." Leonardo da Vinci's task was to portray the state of mind of Jesus himself, who was deeply grieved by his dreadful discovery, and of his disciples, who could not believe there could be a traitor in their small company. If the

* Many of the early impressionists were men of great talent. But it is noteworthy that among these very talented men there were no first-rate portrait painters. This is understandable, for in portrait painting light cannot be the chief *dramatis persona*. Furthermore, the landscapes of the distinguished impressionist masters are good for the very reason that they affectively convey the capricious and diversified effects of light; but there is very little "mood" in them. Feuerbach put it extremely well when he said: "Die Evangelien der Sinne im Zusammenhang lesen heisst denken." ["Reading the gospel of the senses coherently is thinking."] Remembering that by "senses," or sensibility, Feuerbach meant everything that relates to the realm of sensation, it may be said that the impressionists could not, and would not, read the "gospel of the senses." This was the principal shortcoming of their school, and it very soon led to its degeneration. If the landscapes of the early and outstanding impressionist masters are good, very many of those of their very numerous followers resemble caricatures.

artist had believed that the chief *dramatis persona* in a picture is light, he would not have thought of depicting this drama. And if he had painted the fresco nevertheless, its chief artistic interest would have been centred not on what was going on in the hearts of Jesus and his disciples, but on what was happening on the walls of the chamber in which they were assembled, on the table at which they were seated, and on their own skins—that is, on the various light effects. We should then have had not a terrific spiritual drama, but a series of excellently painted patches of light: one, say, on a wall of the chamber, another on the table-cloth, a third on Judas' hooked nose, a fourth on Jesus' cheek, and so on and so forth. But because of this the impression caused by the fresco would be infinitely weaker, and the specific importance of Leonardo da Vinci's production would be infinitely less. Some French critics have compared impressionism with realism in literature. And there is some basis for the comparison. But if the impressionists were realists, it must be admitted that their realism was quite superficial, that it did not go deeper than the "husk of appearances." And when this realism acquired a broad position in modern art—as it undoubtedly did—artists trained under its influence had only one of two alternatives: either to exercise their ingenuity over the "husk of appearances" and devise ever more astonishing and ever more artificial light effects; or to attempt to penetrate beneath the "husk of appearances," having realized the mistake of the impressionists and grasped that the chief *dramatis persona* in a picture is not light, but man and his highly diversified emotional experiences. And we do indeed find both these trends in modern art. Concentration of interest on the "outer husk of appearances" accounts for those paradoxical canvases before which even the most indulgent critic shrugs his shoulders in perplexity and confesses that modern painting is passing through a "crisis of

ugliness.”* Recognition, on the other hand, that it is impossible to stop at the “husk of appearances” impels artists to seek for idea content, that is, to worship what they had only recently burned. But to impart idea content to a production is not so easy as it may seem. Idea is not something that exists independently of the real world. A man’s stock of ideas is determined and enriched by his relations with that world. And he whose relations with that world are such that he considers his ego the “only reality,” inevitably becomes an out-and-out pauper in the matter of ideas. Not only is he bereft of ideas, but—and this is the chief point—he is not in a position to conceive any. And just as people, when they have no bread, eat dockweed, so when they have no clear ideas they content themselves with vague hints at ideas, with surrogates borrowed from mysticism, symbolism and the similar “isms” characteristic of the period of decadence. In brief, we find in painting a repetition of what we have seen in literature: realism decays because of its inherent vacuity: idealistic reaction triumphs.

Subjective idealism was always anchored in the idea that there is no reality save our ego. But it required the boundless individualism of the era of bourgeois decadence to make this idea not only an egotistical rule defining the relations between people each of whom “loves himself as God”—the bourgeoisie was never distinguished by excessive altruism—but also the theoretical foundation of a new esthetics.

The reader has of course heard of the so-called cubists. And if he has had occasion to see some of their productions, I do not run much risk of being mistaken if I assume that he was not at all delighted with them. In me, at any rate, they do not evoke anything resembling esthetic

* See Camille Mauclair’s “La crise de la laideur en peinture,” in his interesting collection of articles, *Trois crises de l’art actuel*, Paris, 1906.

enjoyment. "Nonsense cubed!" are the words that suggest themselves at the sight of these ostensibly artistic exercises. But cubism, after all, has its cause. Calling it nonsense raised to the third degree is not explaining its origin. This, of course, is not the place to attempt such an explanation. But even here one may indicate the direction in which it is to be sought. Before me lies an interesting book: *Du cubisme*, by Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger. Both authors are painters, and both belong to the cubist school. Let us obey the rule *audiatur et altera pars*,* and let us hear what they have to say. How do they justify their bewildering creative methods?

"There is nothing real outside of us," they say.—"... It does not occur to us to doubt the existence of the objects which act upon our senses: but reasonable certainty is possible only in respect to the images which they evoke in our mind."**

From this the authors conclude that we do not know what forms objects have in themselves. And since these forms are unknown, they consider they are entitled to portray them at their own will and pleasure. They make the noteworthy reservation that they do not find it desirable to confine themselves, as the impressionists do, to the realm of sensation. "We seek the essential," they assure us, "but we seek it in our personality, not in an eternity laboriously fashioned by mathematicians and philosophers."***

In these arguments, as the reader will see, we meet, first of all, the already well-known idea that our ego is the "only reality." True, we meet it here in less rigid guise. Gleizes and Metzinger affirm that nothing is farther from their thought than to doubt the existence of external objects. But having granted the existence of the external

* [Let the other side be heard.]

** Op. cit., p. 30.

*** Ibid., p. 31.

world, our authors right there and then declare it to be unknowable. And this means that, for them too, there is nothing real except their ego.

If images of objects arise in us because the latter act upon our external senses, then it surely cannot be said that the outer world is unknowable: we obtain knowledge of it precisely because of this action. Gleizes and Metzinger are mistaken. Their argument about forms-in-themselves is also very lame. They cannot seriously be blamed for their mistakes: similar mistakes have been made by men infinitely more adept in philosophy than they. But one thing cannot be passed over, namely, that from the supposed unknowableness of the outer world, our authors infer that the essential must be sought in "our personality." This inference may be understood in two ways: first, by "personality" may be meant the whole human race in general; secondly, it may mean each personality separately. In the first case, we arrive at the transcendental idealism of Kant; in the second, at the sophistical recognition that each separate person is the measure of all things. Our authors incline towards the sophistical interpretation of their inference.

And once its sophistical interpretation is accepted,* one may permit oneself anything one likes in painting and in everything else. If instead of the "Woman in Blue" (*La femme en bleu*—a painting exhibited by Fernand Léger at last autumn's Salon), I depict several stereometric figures, who has the right to say I have painted a bad picture? Women are part of the outer world around me. The outer world is unknowable. To portray a woman, I have to appeal to my own "personality," and my "personality" lends the woman the form of several haphazardly arranged cubes, or, rather, parallelepipeds. These cubes cause a smile in everybody who visits the Salon. But that's all right. The "crowd" laughs only because it does not

* See the book in question, especially pp. 43-44.

understand the language of the artist. The artist must under no circumstances give way to the crowd. "Making no concessions, explaining nothing and telling nothing, the artist accumulates internal energy which illuminates everything around him."* And until such energy is accumulated, there is nothing for it but to draw stereometric figures.

We thus get an amusing parody on Pushkin's "To The Poet":

Exacting artist, are you pleased with your creation?
You are? Then let the mob abuse your name
And on the altar spit where burns your flame,
And shake your tripod in its childlike animation.

The amusing thing about the parody is that in this case the "exacting artist" is content with the most obvious nonsense. Incidentally, the appearance of such parodies shows that the inherent dialectics of social life have now led the theory of art for art's sake to the point of utter absurdity.

It is not good that man should be alone. The present "innovators" in art are not satisfied with what their predecessors created. There is nothing wrong in this. On the contrary, the urge for something new is very often a source of progress. But not everybody who searches for something new, really finds it. One must know how to look for it. He who is blind to the new teachings of social life, he to whom there is no reality save his own ego, will find in his search for something "new" nothing but a new absurdity. It is not good that man should be alone.

It appears, then, that in present-day social conditions the fruits of art for art's sake are far from delectable. The extreme individualism of the era of bourgeois decay cuts off artists from all sources of true inspiration. It makes them completely blind to what is going on in social life, and condemns them to sterile preoccupation with

* Ibid., p. 42.

personal emotional experiences that are entirely without significance and with the phantasies of a morbid imagination. The end product of their preoccupation is something that not only has no relation to beauty of any kind, but which moreover represents an obvious absurdity that can only be defended with the help of sophistical distortions of the idealist theory of knowledge.

Pushkin's "cold and haughty people" listen to the singing poet with "empty minds."³⁹ I have already said that, coming from Pushkin's pen, this juxtaposition had historical meaning. In order to understand it, we must only bear in mind that the epithets "cold and haughty" were not applicable to the Russian peasant serf of the time. But they were fully applicable to the high society "rabble" whose obtuseness led to the ultimate doom of our great poet. The people who composed this "rabble" might without any exaggeration say of themselves what the rabble say in Pushkin's poem:

We all are treacherous and vicious,
Ungrateful, shameless, meretricious,
Our hearts no feeling ever warms.
Slaves, slanderers and fools, black swarms
Of vices breed in each and all.

Pushkin saw that it would be ridiculous to give "bold" lessons to the heartless aristocratic crowd: they would not have understood them. He did right in proudly turning away from them. More, he did wrong—to the great misfortune of Russian literature—in not turning away from them resolutely enough. But nowadays, the attitude which the poet—and artist generally—who is unable to throw off the old bourgeois Adam maintains toward the people is the very opposite of what we see in the case of Pushkin: now it is no longer the "people"—the real people, whose advanced section is becoming more and more conscious—that can be accused of obtuseness, but the artists who listen with "empty minds" to the noble calls emanating from the people. At best, the fault of these

artists is that their clocks are some eighty years behind the time. Repudiating the finest aspirations of their era, they naively imagine themselves to be continuers of the struggle waged by the romanticists against philistinism. The West-European esthetes, and the Russian esthetes who follow them, are very fond of dilating on the philistinism of the present-day proletarian movement.

This is comical. How baseless the charge of philistinism is which these individuals level at the emancipation movement of the working class, was shown long ago by Richard Wagner. In his well-founded opinion, the emancipation movement of the working class, when carefully considered ("genau betrachtet"), proves to be a movement not toward, but away from philistinism and toward a free life, toward an "artistic humanity" ("zum künstlerischen Menschentum"). It is a movement "for dignified enjoyment of life, the material means for which man will no longer have to procure at the expense of all his vital energies." It is this necessity of expending all one's vital energies to procure the means of subsistence that is nowadays the source of "philistine" sentiments. Constant concern for his means of subsistence "has made man weak, servile, stupid and mean, has turned him into a creature that is incapable either of love or hate, into a citizen who is prepared at any moment to sacrifice the last vestige of free will only that this concern might be eased." The emancipation movement of the working class aims at doing away with this humiliating and corrupting concern. Wagner maintained that only when it is done away with, only when the proletariat's urge for emancipation is realized, will the words of Jesus—take no thought for what ye shall eat, etc.—become true.* He would have been right in adding that *only* when this is realized will there be no serious grounds for juxtaposing esthetics

* "Die Kunst und die Revolution" (R. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II, Leipzig, 1872, pp. 40-41.

to morality, as the believers in art for art's sake do—Flaubert, for example.* Flaubert held that “virtuous books are tedious and false” (“les livres vertueux sont ennuyeux et faux”). He was right—but *only* because the virtue of present-day society—bourgeois virtue—is tedious and false. Flaubert himself saw nothing tedious or false in antique “virtue.” Yet it only differed from bourgeois virtue in not being tainted with bourgeois individualism. Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, as Minister of Education to Nicholas I, considered that the duty of art was to “strengthen the faith, so important to social and private life, that evil deeds meet with fitting retribution already here on earth,” that is, in the society so zealously guarded by the Shirinsky-Shikhmatovs. That opinion, of course, was eminently false and tediously vulgar. Artists do right in turning away from such falsities and vulgarities. And when we read in Flaubert that in a *certain sense* “nothing is more poetic than vice,”** we understand that, in its *real sense*, this is a juxtaposition of vice to the vulgar, tedious and false virtue of the bourgeois moralists and the Shirinsky-Shikhmatovs. But when the social order which breeds this vulgar, tedious and false virtue disappears, the *moral* compulsion to idealize vice will also disappear. Flaubert, I repeat, saw nothing vulgar, tedious or false in antique virtue, although, while respecting it, he could at the same time, owing to the very rudimentary character of his social and political concepts, admire such a monstrous negation of this virtue as the behaviour of Nero. In a socialist society the pursuit of art for art's sake will be a sheer logical impossibility to the extent that there will no longer be that vulgarization of social morals which is now an inevitable consequence of the determination of the ruling class

* “Les carnets de Gustave Flaubert” (L. Bertrand, *Gustave Flaubert*, p. 260).

** *Ibid.*, p. 321.

to retain its privileges. Flaubert says: "L'art c'est la recherche de l'inutile" ("art is a search for the useless"). It is not difficult to detect in these words the basic idea of Pushkin's "The Rabble." But his insistence on this idea only signifies that the artist is revolting against the narrow utilitarianism of the given ruling class, or caste. . . . With the disappearance of classes, this narrow utilitarianism, which is closely akin to *egotism*, will also disappear. Egotism has nothing in common with esthetics: a judgement of taste always carries the presumption that the person who pronounces it is not actuated by considerations of personal advantage. But *personal* advantage is one thing, and *social* advantage another. The desire to be useful to society, which was the basis of antique virtue, is a fountain-head of self-sacrifice, and a self-sacrificing act may easily be—and very often has been, as the history of art shows—a subject of esthetic portrayal. We have only to remember the songs of the primitive peoples or, not to go so far afield, the monument to Harmodius and Aristogeiton in Athens.⁴⁰

The ancient thinkers—Plato and Aristotle, for example—were fully aware how a man is degraded when all his vital energies are absorbed by concern for his material subsistence. The present-day ideologists of the bourgeoisie are also aware of it. They likewise consider it necessary to relieve people of the degrading burden of constant economic cares. But the people they have in mind are the members of the highest social class, which lives by exploiting labour. They see the solution of the problem where the ancient thinkers saw it, namely, in the enslavement of the producers by a fortunate chosen few who more or less approach the ideal of the "superman." But if this solution was conservative even in the days of Plato and Aristotle, now it is arch-reactionary. And if the conservative Greek slaveowners of Aristotle's time could hope to retain their predominant position by dint of their own "valour," the present-day preachers of the

enslavement of the masses are very sceptical of the valour of the bourgeois exploiters. That is why they are so given to dreaming of the appearance at the head of the state of a superhuman genius who will bolster up, by his iron will, the already tottering pillars of class rule. Decadents who are not devoid of political interests are often ardent admirers of Napoleon I.

If Renan called for a strong government capable of compelling the "good rustics" to work for him while he dedicated himself to mental reflection, the present-day esthetes need a social system that would force the proletariat to work while they dedicated themselves to lofty pleasures—such as drawing and painting cubes and other stereometric figures. Being organically incapable of any serious work, they are sincerely outraged at the idea of a social system in which idlers will be entirely unknown.

If you live with the wolves, you must howl with the wolves. The modern bourgeois esthetes profess to be warring against philistinism, but they themselves worship the golden calf no less than the common or garden philistine. "What they think is a movement in art," Maclair says, "is actually a movement in the picture mart, where there is also speculation in unlaunched geniuses."* I would add, in passing, that this speculation in unlaunched geniuses is due, among other things, to the feverish hunt for something "new" to which the majority of the present-day artists are addicted. People always strive for something "new" when they are not satisfied with the old. But the question is, *why* are they not satisfied? Very many contemporary artists are not satisfied with the old for the sole reason that, so long as the general public cling to it, their own genius will remain "unlaunched." They are driven to revolt against the old by a love not for some new idea, but for the "only reality," their own dear ego. But such a love does not inspire an artist; it

* Op. cit., pp. 319-20.

only disposes him to regard even the "idol of Belvedere" from the standpoint of self-advantage. "The money question is so strongly intertwined with the question of art," Mauclair says, "that art criticism is squeezed in a vice. The best critics cannot say what they think, and the rest say only what they think is opportune, for, after all, they have to live by their writing. I do not say this is something to be indignant about, but it is well to realize the complexity of the problem."*

Thus we find that *art for art's sake has turned into art for money's sake*. And the whole problem Mauclair is concerned with boils down to determining the reasons why this has happened. And it is not very difficult to determine them. "There was a time, as in the Middle Ages, when only the superfluous, the excess of production over consumption, was exchanged.

"There was again a time, when not only the superfluous, but all products, all industrial existence, had passed into commerce, when the whole of production depended on exchange. . . .

"Finally, there came a time when everything that men had considered as inalienable became an object of exchange, of traffic and could be alienated. This is the time when the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought—virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc.—when everything, in short, passed into commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality, or, to speak in terms of political economy, the time when everything, moral or physical, having become a marketable value, is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value."**

Is it surprising that at a time of universal venality, art also becomes venal?

* Op. cit., p. 321.

** Karl Marx, *Poverty of Philosophy*, Moscow, p. 36.

Mauclair is reluctant to say whether this is something to be indignant about. Nor have I any desire to assess this phenomenon from the moral standpoint. I try, as the saying goes, not to weep or to laugh, but to understand. I do not say that modern artists "*must*" take inspiration from the emancipatory aspirations of the proletariat. No, if the apple-tree *must* bear apples, and the pear-tree *must* produce pears, artists who adhere to the standpoint of the bourgeoisie *must* revolt against the foresaid aspirations. *In decadent times art "must" be decadent.* This is inevitable. And there is no point in being "indignant" about it. But, as the *Communist Manifesto* rightly says, "in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole."

Among the bourgeois ideologists who go over to the proletariat, we find very few artists. The reason probably is that it is only people who think that can "raise themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole," and modern artists, in contradiction to the great masters of the Renaissance, do extremely little thinking.* But however that may be, it can be said with certainty that every more or less gifted artist will increase his power substantially if he absorbs the great emancipatory ideas of our time. Only these ideas

* "Nous touchons ici au défaut de culture générale qui caractérise la plupart des artistes jeunes. Une fréquentation assidue vous démontrera vite qu'ils sont en général, très ignorants..."

must become part of his flesh and blood, and he must express them precisely as an artist.* He must be able, moreover, to form a correct opinion of the artistic modernism of the present-day ideologists of the bourgeoisie. The ruling class has now reached a position where, for it, going forward means sinking downward. And this sad fate is shared by all its ideologists. The most advanced of them are precisely those who have sunk lower than all their predecessors.

When I expressed the views expounded here, Mr. Lunacharsky challenged me on several points, the chief of which I shall now examine.

First, he was surprised, he said, that I seemed to recognize the existence of an absolute criterion of beauty. There was no such criterion. Everything flowed and changed. Men's notions of beauty also changed. There was no possibility, therefore, of proving that modern art really was passing through a crisis of ugliness.

incapables ou indifférents devant les antagonismes d'idées et les situations dramatiques actuelles, ils œuvrent péniblement à l'écart de toute l'agitation intellectuelle et sociale, confinés dans les conflits de technique, absorbés par l'apparence matérielle de la peinture plus que par sa signification générale et son influence intellectuelle." ["We refer here to the general lack of culture that characterizes most young artists. Frequent concurrence with them will soon show you that they are in general very ignorant. Being incapable of understanding, or indifferent to, the conflicts of ideas and dramatic situations of the present day, they work drudgingly, secluded from all intellectual and social movements, confining themselves to problems of technique and absorbed more with the material appearance of painting than with its general significance and intellectual influence."] Holl, *La jeune peinture contemporaine*, pp. 14-15, Paris, 1912.

* Here I have the satisfaction of citing Flaubert. He wrote to George Sand "Je crois la forme et le fond... deux entités qui n'existent jamais l'une sans l'autre." ["I believe form and substance to be two entities which never exist apart."] *Correspondance*, quatrième série, p. 225. He who considers it possible to sacrifice form "for idea" ceases to be an artist, if he ever was one.

To this I objected, and now object, that I do not think there is, or can be, an absolute criterion of beauty.* People's notions of beauty do undoubtedly change in the course of the historical process. But while there is no *absolute* criterion of beauty, while all its criteria are *relative*, this does not mean that there is no *objective* possibility of judging whether a given artistic design has been well executed or not. Let us suppose that an artist wants to paint a "woman in blue." If what he portrays in his picture really does resemble such a woman, we shall say that he has succeeded in painting a good picture. But if, instead of a woman wearing a blue dress, we see on his canvas several stereometric figures more or less thickly and more or less crudely tinted here and there with blue colour, we shall say that whatever he has painted, it certainly is not a good picture. The closer the execution corresponds to the design, or—to use a more general expression—the closer the form of an artistic production corresponds to its idea, the more successful it is. There you have an objective criterion. And precisely because there is such a criterion, we are entitled to say that

* "It is not the irresponsible whim of capricious taste that suggests the desire to find unique esthetic values that are not subject to the vanity of fashion or the imitation of the herd. The creative dream of a single incorruptible beauty, the living image that will save the world and enlighten and regenerate the erring and fallen, is nourished by the ineradicable urge of the human spirit to penetrate the fundamental mysteries of the Absolute." (V. N. Speransky, *The Social Role of Philosophy*, Introduction, p. xi, Part I, Shipovnik Publishing House, St. Petersburg, 1913.) People who argue in this manner are compelled by logic to recognize an absolute criterion of beauty. But people who argue thus are pure-blooded idealists, and I, for my part, consider myself a no less pure-blooded materialist. Not only do I not recognize the existence of a "single incorruptible beauty"; I do not even know what the words "single incorruptible beauty" can possibly mean. More, I am certain that the idealists do now know either. All the talk about such beauty is "just words."

the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, for example, are better than the drawings of some wretched Themistocles⁴¹ who spoils good paper for his own distraction. When Leonardo da Vinci, say, drew an old man with a beard, the result really was an old man with a beard—so much so that at the sight of him we say: “Why, he’s alive!” But when Themistocles draws an old man, we would do well to write underneath: “This is an old man with a beard”—so that there might be no misunderstanding. In asserting that there can be no objective criterion of beauty, Mr. Lunacharsky committed the sin of which so many bourgeois ideologists, up to and including the cubists, are guilty: the sin of extreme subjectivism. How a man who calls himself a Marxist can be guilty of this sin, I simply cannot understand.

It must be added, however, that I here use the term “beautiful” in a very wide, if you like, in too wide a sense: drawing a bearded old man *beautifully* does not mean drawing a *beautiful* old man. The realm of art is much wider than the realm of the “beautiful.” But throughout its broad realm, the criterion I refer to—correspondence of form to idea—may be applied with equal convenience. Mr. Lunacharsky maintained (if I understood him correctly) that form may quite well correspond to a false idea. But I cannot agree. Remember de Curel’s play *Le repas du lion*. It is based, as we know, on the false idea that the employer stands in the same relation to his workers as the lion stands to the jackals who feed on the crumbs that fall from his royal table. The question is, could de Curel have faithfully expressed in his play this erroneous idea? No. The idea is erroneous because it is in contradiction to the real relation of the employer to his workers. To present it in an artistic production is to distort reality. And when an artistic production distorts reality it is unsuccessful as a work of art. That is why *Le repas du lion* is far below de Curel’s talent. *The Gate of the Kingdom* is far below Hamsun’s talent for the same reason.

Secondly, Mr. Lunacharsky accused me of excessive objectivism. He apparently agreed that an apple-tree *must* bear apples, and a pear-tree must produce pears. But he observed that among the artists who adhere to the bourgeois standpoint there are waverers, whom it is our duty to convince and not leave to the elemental action of bourgeois influences.

I must confess that to me this accusation is even more incomprehensible than the first. In my lecture, I said—and I should like to hope, proved—that modern art is decaying.* I stated that the reason for this phenomenon—to which nobody who sincerely loves art can remain indifferent—is that the majority of our present-day artists adhere to the bourgeois standpoint and are quite imperious to the great emancipatory ideas of our time. In what way can this statement influence the waverers? If it is convincing, it should induce the waverers to adopt the standpoint of the proletariat. And this is all that can be demanded of a lecture whose purpose was to examine the question of art, not to expound or defend the principles of socialism.

* I am afraid that this too may give rise to misunderstanding. By the word "decay" I mean, *comme de raison*, a *whole process*, not an *isolated* phenomenon. This process has not yet ended, just as the social process of decay of the bourgeois order has not yet ended. It would therefore be strange to think that present-day bourgeois ideologists are definitely incapable of producing works of distinction. Such works, of course, are possible even now. But the chances of any such appearing have drastically diminished. Furthermore, even works of distinction now bear the impress of the era of decadence. Take, for example, the Russian trio mentioned above: if Mr. Filosofov is devoid of all talent in any field, Mrs. Hippus possesses a certain artistic talent and Mr. Merezhkovsky is even a very talented artist. But it is easy to see that his latest novel (*Alexander I*), for example, is irretrievably vitiated by his religious mania, which, in its turn, is characteristic of an era of decadence. In such eras even men of very great talent do not produce what they might have produced under more favourable social conditions.

Last but not least, Mr. Lunacharsky, having maintained that it is impossible to prove that bourgeois art is decaying, considered that I would have done wiser to juxtapose to the bourgeois ideals a harmonious system—that was his expression, if I remember rightly—of opposite concepts. And he assured the audience that such a system would in time be elaborated. Now this objection completely passes my understanding. If this system is still *to be* elaborated, then, clearly, it has not yet been elaborated. And if it has not yet been elaborated, how could I have juxtaposed it to the bourgeois views? And what can this harmonious system of concepts possibly be? Modern scientific socialism is unquestionably a fully harmonious system. And it has the advantage that it already exists. But as I have already said, it would have been very strange if, having undertaken to deliver a lecture on the subject of Art and Social Life, I had begun to expound the doctrines of modern scientific socialism—the theory of surplus-value, for example. Everything is good at the proper time and in the proper place.

It is possible however that when Mr. Lunacharsky spoke of a harmonious system of concepts he was referring to the views on proletarian culture recently put forward in the press by his close colleague in thought, Mr. Bogdanov.⁴² If that is so, then his last objection amounted to this, that I yet greater praise would earn, if to Mr. Bogdanov I went to learn.⁴³ I thank him for the advice. But I don't intend to take it. And if anyone should, from inexperience, think of interesting himself in Mr. Bogdanov's pamphlet, *Proletarian Culture*, I would remind him that it was very effectively laughed to scorn in *Sovremennyy Mir*⁴⁴ by another of Mr. Lunacharsky's close colleagues in thought—Mr. Alexinsky.

NOTES

- ¹ The first letter was published in part in the journal *Nachalo*, No. 4, 1899, under the title: *Art. A Sociological Study*, and in full in *Nauchnoye Obozreniye*, No. 11, 1899, entitled: *Unaddressed Letters. First Letter*. The second letter (called: *Unaddressed Letters. The Art of Primitive Peoples*) appeared in *Nauchnoye Obozreniye*, No. 3, 1900, and the third, as a continuation of the second, in the same journal (No. 6, 1900), with the title: *Once More on the Art of Primitive Peoples*. These three letters were republished several times during Plekhanov's lifetime, and were included in Vol. XIV of his *Collected Works*, issued after his death by the State Publishing House, Moscow and Leningrad, 1923-1927.

The fifth and sixth letters, which are essentially continuations of the first three, were not completed and were first published after the author's death in the *Literary Remains of G. V. Plekhanov*, Vol. III (State Social and Economic Publishing House, Moscow, 1936), where they were named the "fifth" and the "sixth" letters respectively.

The fourth letter was only begun by Plekhanov and the fragment is not included in the present edition. p. 7.

- ² Plekhanov called the class of play known as the "tearful comedy" a portrait of the French 18th-century bourgeoisie. Its hero was the "good" bourgeois, and its theme domestic life. p. 29.
- ³ Plekhanov did not get round to this theme in the *Letters*. p. 40.
- ⁴ This subject is dealt with in the *Third Letter* (pp. 73-82 of this edition). p. 42.
- ⁵ The reference is to *N. K. Mikhailovsky*, the theoretician of the Liberal Narodist movement in Russia. p. 52.
- ⁶ As stated in Note 1, the fourth letter (fragment) is not given in the present edition. p. 100.
- ⁷ Here three pages of the manuscript are missing. p. 102.

- ⁸ Plekhanov evidently intended here to quote the following passage from *Essays on Primitive Economic Culture* by the Russian economist N. Sieber: "Every tribe has its own area whose boundaries are well known to all the natives generally, and all the wild animals within this area are considered the property of the tribe which inhabits or wanders through it. . . . The natives of each tribe regard the invasion of the area it inhabits by natives of any other tribe as a moral affront which has to be punished by force of arms. Such violations are as often a cause of native, as of European wars." p. 104.
- ⁹ Here Plekhanov evidently intended to acquaint the reader with the views of Martius on the immoveable property of primitive peoples, as expounded in the book of Sieber referred to in the previous note. Here is the relevant passage: "Inasmuch as the families of a gens or tribe live spread over a given area, this area is regarded by each individual as the property of the whole community. This concept is very clear and vivid in the mind of the Indian. . . . This clear concept of property belonging to the whole tribe is founded on the necessity of the latter's possessing a forest area as an exclusive hunting territory. . . . Trespassing on hunting territories is one of the most frequent causes of war." p. 104.
- ¹⁰ Here several pages of the manuscript are missing. p. 104.
- ¹¹ In Plekhanov's papers the end of this quotation is given, viz.: "puisque les mœurs sont engendrées par l'état social" ["since morals are engendered by the social state"]. See Burnouf, *La science des religions*, Paris, 1872, p. 287. p. 108.
- ¹² Plekhanov had in mind the following passages from Tylor and Marillier: "One great element of religion, that moral element which among the higher nations forms its most vital part, is indeed little represented in the religion of the lower races. It is not that these races have no moral sense or no moral standard, for both are strongly marked among them, if not in formal precept, at least in that traditional consensus of society which we call public opinion, according to which certain actions are held to be good or bad, right or wrong. It is that the conjunction of ethics and Animistic philosophy, so intimate and powerful in the higher culture, seems scarcely yet to have begun in the lower." (Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. I, London, 1903, p. 427.)

"L'idée que les hommes se font de la divinité s'est donc, au cours des temps, ainsi transformée que c'est sur des raisons morales, sur des motifs tirés d'un besoin de justice mal satisfait en ce monde, que se fondent le plus solidement chez les peuples civilisés la foi en Dieu et la croyance en une vie future,

tandis qu'à l'origine la survivance de l'âme et l'existence des esprits et des dieux étaient des conceptions qui servaient essentiellement à l'intelligence humaine à expliquer et à comprendre les phénomènes de la nature et de la vie, elles tenaient dans la pensée primitive la place que tiennent dans la nôtre les grandes forces physiques et les grandes hypothèses cosmogoniques. La morale s'est développée à mesure que les sociétés devenaient plus complexes, et les dieux se sont 'moralisés' en même temps que se moralisaient les hommes." ["The ideas men formed of the divinity have changed to such an extent that it is on moral reasons, on motives derived from a need for justice that is little satisfied in this world that with civilized peoples faith in God and belief in a future life are most firmly founded, whereas originally survivance of the soul and the existence of spirits and gods were conceptions which essentially served the human mind to explain and understand phenomena of nature and life: they held in primitive thought the place which great physical forces and cosmogonic hypotheses holds in ours. Morals developed as social life became more complex, and the gods were 'moralized' at the same time as men were moralized."] (L. Marillier, *La survivance de l'âme et l'idée de justice chez les peuples non civilisés*, Paris, 1894, p. 46.)

- p. 109.
- ¹³ See p. 9 of the present edition. p. 109.
- ¹⁴ The German author is Karl Marx. See *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1954, p. 632. p. 125.
- ¹⁵ Here the manuscript breaks off. p. 133.
- ¹⁶ Here a page is missing in the manuscript. p. 141.
- ¹⁷ Two pages are here missing in the manuscript. The quotation has been inserted by the editors from Jochelson's *On the Rivers Yasachnaya and Korkodon*, according to the reference given by Plekhanov. p. 142.
- ¹⁸ Here the manuscript breaks off. p. 146.
- ¹⁹ The article, *Art and Social Life*, was originally published in parts in the journal *Sovremennik*, November and December 1912, and January 1913. It is included in Vol. XIV of Plekhanov's *Collected Works*, published after his death. p. 149.
- ²⁰ Plekhanov's assessment of Pisarev's views on art is not quite correct. Pisarev was a strong opponent of the theory of art for art's sake, and held that art should be deeply imbued with thought content and reflect the progressive ideas of its time. But he did not deny the esthetic value of art and literature. p. 150.
- ²¹ The quotation is from the article, "Poetry. The Works of Aristotle." See Chernyshevsky, *Selected Philosophical Essays*, Moscow, 1953, p. 433. p. 150.

- ²² Nekrasov, "The Poet and the Citizen." p. 151.
- ²³ This and the previous fragment are from Pushkin's *The Poet and the Crowd*. p. 152.
- ²⁴ *The Poet and the Crowd* (originally published under the title, *The Rabble*), like several other poems of Pushkin, as for instance, "The Poet" and "To the Poet," bore a distinctly polemical character.
- In the 1860's, Russian critics who held that art should be independent of social life, appealed to the authority of Pushkin against the revolutionary democrats. They falsely construed these poems and maintained that Pushkin was a believer in "pure art." Similar views were held by the Russian decadents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. p. 152.
- ²⁵ The armed revolt raised against the tsarist autocracy by members of the Russian nobility in St. Petersburg, on December 14, 1825. The rebels came to be known as the Decembrists. The leaders were executed and many of the participants exiled to Siberia. p. 153.
- ²⁶ From Pushkin's "To the Poet." p. 156.
- ²⁷ A school of French poets, including Leconte de Lisle, and others. The name Parnassians was derived from a series of collections of poems they published under the title *Parnasse Contemporain*. They preached the cult of art for art's sake and were the forerunners of the decadents. p. 157.
- ²⁸ A trend of thought in Russia which arose in the forties and fifties of the 19th century and which believed that Russia's development would be distinct from that of the West and would be based on the village commune (which was supposedly peculiar to the Slav nations), Orthodox Christianity and harmony between tsar and people. p. 166.
- ²⁹ By the "work of Peter" Ostrovsky meant the reforms of Peter I, designed to Europeanize Russia and end her backwardness. p. 166.
- ³⁰ Belinsky expressed this opinion in his article, "A View of Russian Literature in 1847." See Belinsky, *Selected Philosophical Works*, Moscow 1956, p. 455. p. 175.
- ³¹ The quoted words are taken from Nekrasov's poem "Knight for an Hour." p. 182.
- ³² The reference is to Pisarev's article, "Pushkin and Belinsky." p. 185.
- ³³ It has now been established that Pushkin was familiar with the writings of Saint-Simon. p. 185.
- ³⁴ The feudal landlord in Saltykov-Shchedrin's satirical tale, *The*

- Wild Landlord*, who wanted "to solve" the peasant problem by murdering off the peasants. p. 190.
- ³⁵ Vasily Shibanov—hero of an historical ballad of the same name by Count Alexei Tolstoi. p. 199.
- ³⁶ "Vocal tool"—*instrumentum vocale*, the name given to slaves in Ancient Rome. p. 199.
- ³⁷ Babayev—a character in Sergeyev-Tsensky's play of the same name. p. 204.
- ³⁸ Eric Falk—a character in *Homo Sapiens*, one of Przybyszewski's best-known novels. p. 208.
- ³⁹ The words in quotation marks and the verses in the same paragraph are from Pushkin's "The Poet and the Crowd." p. 217.
- ⁴⁰ Harmodius and Aristogeiton—citizens of Athens who in 514 B.C. plotted to kill the ruling tyrants, Hippias and Hipparchus. p. 220.
- ⁴¹ Themistocles—son of Manilov, in Gogol's *Dead Souls*. p. 226.
- ⁴² Bogdanov—pseudonym of A. A. Malinovsky. At one time sided with the Bolsheviks. After the 1905 Revolution he sought to revise the philosophical foundations of Marxism and expounded a variety of subjective idealism (empirio-criticism). His views were sharply criticized by Lenin and Plekhanov.
- Bogdanov held that the working class must develop a culture of its own, "proletarian culture," which broke off all links with the cultural heritage of mankind—a view which ran contrary to Marxism. p. 228.
- ⁴³ A play on lines from Krylov's fable, *The Ass and the Nightingale*. After hearing the nightingale sing, the ass commended her, but thought she "yet greater praise would earn, if to the farmyard cock she went to learn."
- ⁴⁴ *Sovremennyy Mir*—a monthly journal published in St. Petersburg, 1906-18. p. 228.

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